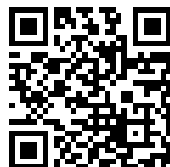

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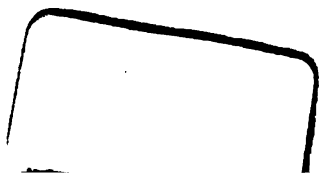


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by John Ayscough

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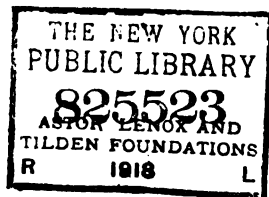
BY *Bir Kerstapfe-Grew, R. A.*
JOHN AYSŒOUGH

AUTHOR OF "FRENCH WINDOWS," "GRACECHURCH," ETC.



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DEDICATION

TO

FRANK BICKERSTAFFE-DREW

No doubt every book published, inasmuch as it is supposed to have readers, belongs to the public; but, unless it be dedicated to someone very important, the dedication is a personal affair between the Author and the *Dedicatee*, and does not concern the public—or the reviewers. Therefore one may say, so to speak, what one likes in the letter conveying the dedication.

I asked you if I might dedicate this book to you because you knew more about it than anybody else, and had had a sort of hand in it. As you know, it was begun before the war, and had to be laid aside till my return from France two years after the earlier portion of it had been written. Even on my return I could not, for a long time, go on with it; there was so much to do after my long absence, and during my dear mother's last days any spare time I had seemed so specially to belong to her. Then came her death: and for long I felt incapable of taking up the task that had suffered so enormous an interruption.

My own wish was to lay the book aside indefinitely, and write another; but the publishers, though patience itself in waiting, were firm in asking for the completion of this story instead of accepting another new one. So one day I

v

told you the story, and your interest in it encouraged me to take my task up again; and it was chiefly in accordance with your advice that the latter part of the book followed the lines it has. It seems to me that the little history of the book may be responsible for special faults in it. Perhaps they would have been there in any case.

Of course, there are other reasons why I am glad you should accept the very small gift of this dedication; but I think they are too personal to set down even in this letter. It must be enough to say that the very trifling offering is, like many other presents, a small tribute of a great affection.

I am your guardian, you are my ward, and I wonder if any ward and guardian were ever united by a closer bond of sympathy and mutual understanding.

After what happened on the 13th of July, 1916, this house could never again have been a home but for your presence in it. No sympathy in my great loss could ever be more tender and understanding than yours has been, and none could have done so much to sweeten its bitterness.

More than that may not be said here. I will end only by repeating that this book is inscribed to you as a most inadequate tribute of an ever-growing affection and an ever-deepening respect by

Your very grateful kinsman and guardian,

JOHN AYS COUGH.

December 6, 1917.

JACQUELINE

PART I

BOON COURT AND WILDSPUR GRANGE

CHAPTER I

BETWEEN Boon* Court, on the eastern border of Rentshire, and Wildspur Grange, at the extreme western end of Huntshire, the distance was but four miles and a half, and Lady Berengaria de Bohun never wished it less. Circumstances far beyond her control had brought about a sort of connexion between the two houses, and she would have liked to forget it, if she had been able: as it was, she ignored the connexion as much as she could. And for six or seven years accident had helped her, for Wildspur Grange had been empty, or let from time to time to tenants whose intimacy there was no occasion for her to seek.

Boon Court was Lady Berengaria's property, and since her father's death, had been her home. She was the elder of the late Earl of Lambeth's two daughters, and, so far as the Boon Court estate

* Always so pronounced, but originally spelt "Bohun."

went, had been his heiress. It was worth about seven thousand a year; and another property called Bracebourne, of nearly the same value, but with only a smallish house upon it and in a distant part of Rentshire, had been left to her sister, Lady Adelgitha. The rest of his huge estates their father, the thirteenth Earl, had bequeathed to the fourteenth Earl, his second cousin, for he had never had a son: almost all the land was unentailed, and perhaps no one would have thought him unjust had he left a much larger portion to his own children. But he had always been on excellent terms with his cousin, and he had no desire to reduce the consequence of the very ancient family dignity. Nevertheless, he left charges on the greater estates to the extent of five thousand a year apiece for his daughters during their life. Thus the fourteenth Earl came in for some eighty thousand a year, and the Ladies Berengaria and Adelgitha for twelve thousand each: the Boon Court and Bracebourne estates were their own absolutely.

Lady Berengaria at the time this story begins was nearly forty-five and had never married: and though Lady Adelgitha, who was a year younger, was married and had a husband living, she and he lived at Boon Court with their sister.

There were special reasons for this: Sir Jeremy Joscelyn, who had married Lady Adelgitha, was not a poor man, but he had no family estate, and after

the honeymoon (which lasted five months, and had been spent on the Continent) they came to stay with Lady Berengaria. In family council it was then decided that the small Manor House at Bracebourne should be somewhat enlarged, and that meanwhile the bride and bridegroom should remain at Boon Court. At Boon Court Lady Adelgitha's only child, a little girl, baptized Jacqueline, was born; but the poor baby's mother became insane. It was but a feeble, half-hearted sort of insanity, but it proved permanent. There was not, or there was not admitted to be, the slightest necessity for the unfortunate lady to be shut up: and her sister was determined that there should be nothing of the kind. She insisted on keeping the poor creature in her own charge, with proper nurses and attendants, and did so keep her, always praying for a complete recovery, which however had not been granted to her faithful prayers at the time when our story begins.

Lady Berengaria, than whom there was never a better woman, also undertook the care of her baby niece, again with proper nurses to act under her. And, indeed, there was another child in the Boon Court nursery who had not the same claim on her devotion—but she gave it, very nearly as gladly. This child was Frederick Joscelyn, Sir Jeremy's son by his first wife, who had been Lady Hilda Cruickshanks. Sir Jeremy in one sense had been unfor-

fortunate in his marriages: for though both his wives had been young, handsome, well-dowered, and of higher rank than himself, he may be said to have lost each of them within a year of marriage. Lady Hilda had died ten months after her wedding, in giving birth to her son, and Lady Adalgitha had gone, as roughly-spoken people said, out of her mind, at the birth of her daughter. As Sir Jeremy had only been a widower twelve months at the date of his second marriage, his little boy was not quite two years old when his half-sister Jacqueline was born.

When Lady Berengaria sat in her nursery, superintending the toilettes of her sister's daughter and of her brother-in-law's son, she thanked God in her heart that she had never married. For her only hobby was usefulness. She had hardly thought of marrying: when she came thus into the possession of a ready-made nursery she was under nine-and-twenty, but she considered herself almost an old maid, and was now more than ever resolved to become one in down-right earnest. If she were to marry who could be trusted to look after those two babies? She did not say, even to herself, that she could not trust Sir Jeremy; because it was her earnest resolve, by God's grace, never to be in the least uncharitable, even in the inmost recesses of her own mind: she was a truly devout woman, of most sincere piety, and harsh judgments she knew to

be utterly opposed to perfect Christianity. And the avoidance of them was her special difficulty, for common sense was often against her in the effort: she was all common sense, and her natural shrewd perception would try to assure her that many of her neighbours were silly, selfish, and self-indulgent. She had inwardly disliked her sister's marriage, and she had not particularly liked Sir Jeremy. He had been left a widower at eight and thirty, and she had thought it might well become him to remain one: instead of which he proposed to Lady Adelgitha, a girl of six-and-twenty, before his boy was eleven months old, and was married six or seven weeks later. Lady Berengaria had never thought much of his first wife's family, but it was certainly much above his own rank, for Sir Jeremy's father, the first baronet, had only been a famous doctor, and there were those who said that he had started in life as Jeremiah Joss Linn, and had blurred the two latter names into one when he grew into notice—as an *accoucheur*. It might be very well for a Lady Hilda Cruickshanks to marry the son of an *accoucheur* with a new title, and a dubious name, but the de Bohuns were very different.

One of Lady Berengaria's other special difficulties in her earnest and most sincere efforts at real Christianity was family pride: she knew that her ancestors had been noble for eight centuries, in her heart she believed the de Bohuns to be higher than

any family in England, and they belonged to history: but she contradicted her heart when it whispered of these matters, and tried hard, hard, to think that to be a de Bohun was nothing at all in the sight of God. Yet truth is everything, and are not facts a part of truth? Facts are facts: and some pedigrees are facts, though many are graceful fictions. There was no fiction whatever about the de Bohun pedigree. And then Lady Berengaria had a firm belief that it was well for such a country as England to have such families as the de Bohuns, and all down her long back-bone she was an English-woman, bigotedly English. The de Bohuns had never misbehaved themselves: they had been loyal in disloyal times: they had lived as became great people; but Lady Berengaria could not think it became one of them to marry a Sir Somebody Joscelyn or Joss Linn, not that the spelling mattered much.

When she was quite sure that her sister intended to be that baronet's second wife, she made the best of it—but, in her heart, she thanked God that their father was not alive to be vexed by it. She knew well how it would have offended every idea of his, and she could not feel that he would have been wrong: and then, he was hardly two years dead, and Adelgitha must know as well as herself how hard it would have been for her to have married Sir Jeremy had the old Earl been still alive.

Thus Lady Berengaria's conscience was afflicted by divided duty: there was a strong sense of duty to her class; a sense of filial duty all the stronger that the dead father could not insist on it: and the other duty of charity. Charity bade her be sisterly and loving, and she did not flinch from it, or excuse herself on the ground of the other duties.

CHAPTER II

"BUT, Addy," she had said to her sister, "there is another thing."

This was when Lady Adelgitha, paving the way for a full announcement of her engagement, had confessed that she thought it likely Sir Jeremy would propose. She had a perfect right to say that it was likely, for he had begun to propose already, only she had stopped him—for the moment.

When her sister said "there is another thing," Lady Adelgitha knew quite well what was meant, but she only fidgeted in her chair, and tried to look all at sea.

"You know there is another thing," Lady Berengaria went on, reluctantly and with diffidence; "he is a Protestant."

Now the de Bohuns had always been Catholics: at the Reformation they had stuck to the old religion, and Earl Humphrey the VII. had been beheaded by Henry VIII. for refusing to take the

oath of the Kings' Supremacy in religion as in temporals. Queen Elizabeth had beheaded Earl Humphrey the VIII., as was maintained by his friends, for saying that the Queen of Scots (then in prison at Chartley) was the loveliest lady in England; but him also Lady Berengaria esteemed as a martyr.

When Lady Berengaria alluded to her proposed brother-in-law's Protestantism, she spoke in a low voice, very gently. But her sister was obstinate, and was not to be persuaded by gentleness.

"Earl John married a Protestant," she remarked.

"Yes, dear; and what came of it?"

Earl John, their great-grandfather, had been the black sheep of the family. He had not only married a Protestant, but had allowed his wife to bring her children up in her own religion: all but the eldest son, and that one son had died in early youth. So that it had seemed as if the old Catholic house of de Bohun were to come to an end. Then four out of the five other sons had died, or been killed, one after the other, and all unmarried. John, a midshipman, was killed at Trafalgar, Hugh at Waterloo, Eustace in a duel, Henry died of small-pox: only the youngest, Aymer, had been left, and on his death-bed Earl John had implored him to go back to the old religion. He had done so, and had married a Catholic, and all had come right; but only as it were by accident.

Earl John had been a black-sheep in other ways, having been a bosom-friend of the Regent, and lived in such a way as to suit his august master.

"Besides," said Lady Adelgitha, "he wouldn't mind changing. I'm sure he wouldn't."

Her sister saw very clearly that the change had been discussed between them, and that matters had gone too far for any advice of hers to do good. So she held her peace, and quietly resolved to make the best of it. But the idea of Sir Jeremy's conversion did not fill her with elation. She earnestly wished that all Protestants would become Catholics, and if Sir Jeremy had been a ploughman, converted by attending a Mission, or by listening to Father Heath's sermons, and honestly eager to join his Church, she would have been indeed elated; but that this philandering widower should "not mind changing" because he wanted to marry her sister did not much edify her. She had too much sense and too honest a sincerity. Still she knew it would be better that her sister's future children should not have a Protestant father; better, too, that Adelgitha herself should not feel she had married a Protestant. As a matter of fact, Sir Jeremy put himself promptly "under instruction," and was received into the Church two days before his second marriage: on that day Lady Berengaria gave him a *Garden of the Soul*, sumptuously bound, and a set of agate rosary-beads that had been blessed by the

Pope. And her brother-in-law's conversion turned out in the long run almost better than she had ventured to hope, but that, though she never thought of it, was largely due to the fact that he lived in the same house with herself, and was a man likely to be formed by his surroundings. At Boon Court his surroundings were very Catholic indeed.

If Lady Adelgitha Joscelyn, like her predecessor Lady Hilda, had died, it is probable that Sir Jeremy would have married a third time; but she only lost her wits in a half-hearted fashion, and he and she and his son and her daughter all lived on under Lady Berengaria's efficient care, and for all four it was the best thing that could have happened to them. In the discharge of this quadruple guardianship Lady Berengaria, too, found her happiness; of independent, separate happiness on her own account she had never thought. If she had had no such duties ready made for her she might have become a nun, as it was, she was sure that could not at present be the will of God in her regard.

At the time this story opens she was nearly forty-five: Jacqueline was seventeen, Frederick nineteen, and Sir Jeremy about fifty-six; but Sir Jeremy was content to look a good deal younger than his age, and Lady Berengaria was equally content to look older than hers.

CHAPTER III

"BERENGARIA," said Sir Jeremy at breakfast, one morning, "Lady Louisa is coming back to Wildspur to live."

Lady Berengaria had always perceived that he kept up some irregular correspondence with his other sister-in-law, and had never perceived any necessity for it. But she was a woman who, to many other virtues, added that rare one of minding her own business, and never once had she said a word as to her feelings in this connexion. All the same he knew them. When he wrote letters to Lady Louisa he did not allude to the circumstance: but he did write them, because, having married daughters of two Earls, he could not bear altogether to lose the good of it even in the case of one of them.

"She has been away a long time," said Lady Berengaria, buttering a piece of dry toast for her sister.

There were times when poor Lady Adelgitha had to live out of sight, entirely in her own set of rooms—very pretty and cheerful rooms. But there were also times when there seemed to Lady Berengaria to be no such necessity, and when that was the case she would not have her sister kept aloof: when Lady Adelgitha appeared to flicker on the confines of sense, Lady Berengaria (always hoping for the

answer to her prayers for a complete recovery) would judge, rightly or wrongly, that it must be well for her to be among sane people, instead of being isolated when such isolation could be noted by the poor thing herself. The present was one of these lucid intervals, and had lasted for several weeks—but it showed signs of wearing out.

"Who is coming back?" inquired Lady Adelgitha, watching the buttering of her toast. "Two pats, Berengaria: I like it thick. Thick as—as the leaves in Vallombrosa. We were there with papa, don't you remember? And we saw them: but they were much the same thickness as the leaves here. Who is coming back?"

"Lady Louisa Raffham," answered her sister in a low voice, handing over the toast.

"I thought she was dead," observed Lady Adelgitha after a moment or two of placid enjoyment.

"No, dear. But she has been away for many years."

"Somebody died, . . ." whispered the poor woman, after a painful groping in her memory. "Was it . . ." and, putting down her toast, she formed the letters M and E of the deaf and dumb alphabet with her fingers, for her sister's benefit, as it were in confidence.

Sir Jeremy did not hear (he was, in fact, just a trifle deaf, though he would not own to it), nor did he see the aside in dumb-show.

Lady Berengaria sighed, and with a soft, very tender smile shook her head. It was a long, not beautiful head, and her nose was long and frosty too; but the expression of those patient, loving eyes was beautiful. Her sister did not understand much, but that she did understand—the love and gentleness of that plain, familiar face: and she reached out a timid hand, round the corner of the table, under the table-cloth, and squeezed Berengaria's hand.

"I'm so glad," she whispered; "I thought it might be me. I knew somebody was. You know he" (with a quick, furtive glance at her husband) "is a widower."

"It's all right, dear," whispered her sister, nodding and smiling. "Have another piece?"

She *had* another piece, and liked it: but her poor wits were pushing her back into tangles of memory, and presently she called out:

"Someone *did* die, though . . ."

Sir Jeremy looked up, and Berengaria looked down, and her bent head was itself a prayer.

"Mamma," said Frederick, "I expect you heard that old Bluggy, the lodge-keeper, died."

"Dear, dear!" murmured the lad's step-mother. "I don't remember the name. Bluggy! Will there be a funeral? My father went to Simon Webb's funeral, because he had been lodge-keeper forty

years, but his name wasn't Bluggy. Shall we go in mourning, Berengaria? I hate black."

"No, dear, no. The funeral is over. We shall wear no black."

"*That's* a good thing! I wouldn't wear it when I was married, though a widow. It wouldn't have been lucky. I wore—Berengaria, can you remember what I wore?"

"Yes, dear, very well. . . ."

"Did I look nice?"

"Yes: more than nice. . . ."

Lady Adelgitha nodded and smiled, and slightly patted her hair first on one side of her head, then on the other. It was beautiful hair, of a rich golden-brown colour, soft, silky and shining, and very abundant; and it was always dressed with great care and taste. Her figure also was excellent; she was not lean like her sister, but neither was she fat, and she held herself well. She had still a fine complexion, brilliant but delicate, and the light of her great violet-blue eyes was not dimmed. In all these seventeen years she had never shed a tear, and had scarcely aged. Though but a year younger than Berengaria she looked less than thirty, and was still almost a lovely woman. Perhaps her great beauties were, her nose, which was not *rétroussé*, though very nearly, and exquisite in shape; her perfectly formed mouth; and her teeth: they were even, very white, and faultless—she had

never been to a dentist in her life. Finally, she was always dressed becomingly, and spent much money and thought upon her clothes.

Lady Berengaria looked fifty at least, and her dull, almost black hair had become iron-grey. It had none of the rich natural curl that her sister's had, and it was not over-plentiful, nor was it arranged becomingly. Her skin was sallow, and her nose was far from pretty—long, and of uncertain outline. She had never been in the least handsome, and had made up her mind at fifteen that she was ugly, and had never afterwards thought about it at all. But she was a thorough de Bohun, and that she did like. Many of them had been plain, and people said that if Earl Humphrey the VIIIth's head had been better worth looking at Queen Elizabeth would not have cut it off so remorselessly. All the de Bohuns had good figures, however, and Lady Berengaria's was good, only that she was too thin.

She dressed herself very badly: not meanly, but in dull, almost ugly, clothes, that had a hard, uncompromising look. Even her eyes were not pretty eyes, but they had a depth and thoughtfulness that saved them at all events from insignificance: they had been dimmed by much anxiety and many vigils—hundreds of times she had watched by her sister's bed all through the long, long, lonely night: yet she had not been as lonely as most of us would have been, for God was a reality to her, near and living,

loving and compassionate. Those eyes of hers, tired as they were, had wonderful lights of tenderness and truth in them, and her mouth, too, could form itself into lines of sensitive pitifulness and sympathy. Plain, almost dowdy, as she was, it was only a coarsely superficial critic who could say without a pang of self-reproach that she was quite insignificant. Nature had not formed her face in any mould of gracious beauty, but God had written fine things on it—as He will when we will let Him.

As for Lady Adelgitha she was not like any de Bohun, but she was singularly like her great-grandmother, that wife of Earl John who had not been a Catholic. Countess Giralda had been a daughter of Lord St. Declans, and all the M'Moroghs of that family were beautiful—but there was a crazy strain in their blood. One of the daughters of Earl John and Countess Giralda had lost her reason, and it was partly to that dreadful circumstance that Lady Berengaria had alluded when she said to her sister, “And what came of it!” That, as the reader may remember, was when Adelgitha had cited Earl John’s marriage as a precedent.

CHAPTER IV

BUT we must go back to the breakfast-table at Boon Court; though Sir Jeremy and his son had left it, the two sisters were still there.

"Berengaria," said Lady Adelgitha, "I want to remember about this Lady Louisa—what name was it?"

"Raffham, dear. But if I were you I shouldn't trouble about remembering it."

"You don't like her?"

Lady Berengaria did *not* like her: but it was never her custom to express dislike of people.

"I haven't seen her for years: we none of us have. She has been away for nearly seven years."

"Why did she go away?"

"She went away when her husband died. Mr. Raffham—he used to keep hounds . . . and she had hunted a great deal . . ."

"Did he take the hounds away when he died, so that she couldn't hunt any more? If he did it on purpose he was spiteful. She might go on hunting all the same."

"So she did—not at once, of course. But soon. And not here. She took some small box in Leicestershire, and has mostly spent her time hunting—when there is any. They don't hunt in summer, you know."

"Lady Louisa Raffham! Raffham. I don't remember the name . . . Berengaria!"

"Well, dear?"

"Do you think I've lost my memory?"

"Perhaps—a little."

"Who took it? When I lost my bracelet it was taken. Who took my memory?"

"Addy, dear, no one took your bracelet; you thought so, but I didn't, and you know I searched and searched, and found it."

"Where?"

"At the bottom of your water-jug, in the water."

"I wish you'd look for my memory: or tell Fletcher if you're busy. Raffham! Was it always Raffham?"

"No, dear. That was her married name."

"And before?"

Lady Berengaria did not want to tell what it was before: it was hard to say what chord of memory once made to sound would excite her sister. But Adelgitha was obstinate and persistent.

"What before?" she repeated with a queer, fumbling curiosity.

"Cruickshanks. She was Lady Louisa Cruickshanks."

"Sir Jeremy's sister-in-law?"

"Yes, dear."

"The other died, didn't she. Lady Hilda, I mean."

"Yes, dear."

"Ah! That's why he is a widower. Does he mind?"

"Mind what, Addy?"

"Being—that. He *seems* all right. Excuse my asking. But I take a sort of interest in him. I married him once. Did you hear? Where's Jacqueline? She wasn't at breakfast."

"No, dear. She is away."

"On a visit?"

"She is away for a time . . ."

"When she comes back desire her to come to me. I wish to speak to her. She should be civil to Sir Jeremy: there's a connexion, you know. I married him once, and Jacqueline's your niece, and you're my sister, and he's your brother-in-law. She should remember the connexion and be civil. Girls are thoughtless and negligent. Is she proud?"

"No, dear: I'm sure she isn't."

"Because I should not like her to seem proud to him. She, and you, and I, are de Bohuns, and he's—not exactly that, is he?"

And the poor thing smiled, and nodded, and looked condescending.

"No Addy. He is a Joscelyn, you know."

"A Joscelyn! There are no such people. 'A Joscelyn.' There are Howards, and Courtenays, and de Bohuns—who ever heard of the Joscelyns? But Jacqueline shouldn't seem to remember it. One does remember, of course, doesn't one? But it would be a terrible *manque* to let it show. Who's that boy?"

"Frederick?"

"Is that his name? He calls you Aunt Berengaria. And he called me 'mamma'——"

"He always does, you know. He loves you dearly."

"Does he now? If I'm really his mamma there's some excuse for it. That's all right in families. But—do you fancy him much?"

"Yes, Addy, I do——"

"He's not a bad boy?"

"No, a very good one. He is like my own son. Addy, dear, listen. His own mother, you remember, is dead. . . ."

"Ah! And you said I *wasn't*! And I'm his mamma! Berengaria, you aren't going to begin to deceive me. Fletcher does—she says it's only seven when she calls me—often; and it's nearly eight. Should you think Jacqueline likely to marry him?"

"No, dear. I wish you would come out now; it is a beautiful morning, but these lovely mornings at the end of winter often turn to rain. Let us have our drive now."

And out they went for their drive. Lady Berengaria would never let her sister be shut up, and whenever her state allowed it, and the weather suited, she took her out: sometimes in the gardens, for the poor crazy woman loved flowers and plants, and could talk much more sensibly about them than about people. It was seldom a gardener heard her say anything crazy, or any servant either: for at

breakfast and luncheon Lady Berengaria would have no servants in the room, and at dinner the invalid only appeared at her very best times. There were often weeks together when she talked very little and quite sanely: it was when the lucid periods drew to a close that she became talkative. We have called her an invalid, but her physical health was almost perfect, and for mind and body it was well for her to be much out of doors—when that could be. When they drove, the carriage took them along the rather lonely roads, and even through the little pretty villages, and all this the poor lady loved. She had a keener eye for the loveliness of field and copse, of grassy lane, and sedgy pool, than her sister: a blue sky flecked with slow-sailing ships of cloud, the running shadows on a sunny patch of moorland, the cry of coots hidden behind a reach of reedy stream, the pheasant's call, and the whistle of blackbirds in spring, would bring into her face a glad elation, into her strangely shallow eyes a depth of delight, that it paid poor Berengaria for all her tender patience to see there. And no hedger along the roads, no villager, who saw the handsome, beautifully dressed lady go by smiling pleasantly, ever spoke of her as mad. She was, they understood, "queer" at times: but they didn't think it could be much. Berengaria would have let every limb of her own be cut off rather than let her sister

lose the happiness that what she saw in their drives gave to her.

"Berengaria," she said to-day, "isn't the sweet smell of the wind wonderful? There aren't any flowers yet, and there's no hay, but it smells perfect."

Her sister sniffed the soft breeze obediently, but could smell nothing.

"You were always cleverer than me in that way," she said cheerfully. "I like the country, and I hate London: but I can't see and smell and hear the country as you can."

"No, dear. You never were clever, you know. Papa mentioned it to me—in confidence. Do you see how exquisite the colour of those woods is growing—quite different from last week? They were just brown then, grey and brown: now a blush is creeping over them. A million early buds are going to be born into leaves on each tree—and so their mothers blush, just a little. And the birds are trying to learn the love-songs their fathers sang last year. Does God have to teach each bird Himself? Oh, Berengaria! What things He has to think of. Could *you*? It would make me dizzy. But He never forgets anything. He knows just what each bird's tune is—and never mixes them up, but teaches each one exactly what it is. And the flowers—He has all the colours ready every spring and summer; and out they come always just right.

Don't you think it odd He should take such endless trouble—all about things that no one else would think mattered? *You* wouldn't. If all the poor people had enough to eat, and all the old women had flannel petticoats, and blankets, and coal, and the men wouldn't get drunk, or swear, or misbehave, you'd never bother in the least about the woods—and there'd not be a leaf ready, nor a bud either. And the fields—you'd just have grass enough ready for the cows (you hate tea without milk), but the flowers in the hedges would all be forgotten. You'd have plenty of apples, but no apple-blossom first. You'd make loaves grow ready-baked in autumn, but you'd never think of making the ploughed land (pinky-purple) get shot with green, then green quite, then whitey-golden with wind waves flowing over it, not you! And the sheaves of orange-brown corn with buff legs would never have occurred to you—never. You'd say there was no necessity. But God doesn't: He thinks of poor people who have nothing nice to look at, and can't get about, and so He takes all this trouble to make even the corners of the world—the odds and ends of places—full of lovely things. Do you ever see Him peeping? No? I do though: behind scraps of wood where the black-thorn is snowed over, and in winter out of the frosty fog when the sun mixes wine with its milkiness. Do you know why I see and you don't? Because I'm M-A-D," and those

three letters she formed with her fingers on her hand, nodding mysteriously at the backs of the coachman and the footman up on the box. "Yes, I am. I've—lost—my—wits. And they have been found: I know where they are, but it's no use your looking for them. They're in heaven, waiting for me. *He* found them, and kept them—you know who? Yes; God. He told me. He told me another thing. It was one night: you were sitting there by my bed, reading and praying. Wasn't it cold? Even in bed I knew it was cold, cold. And the wind said things—in the chimney and outside . . . rude things. '*I don't rave,*' it said. '*You do. Come out.*' But I wouldn't go—I should, perhaps, if you hadn't been there. And I wouldn't argue. But I told God I was tired of pretending to be asleep and watching you, and I said I would like to play Patience, only I had never learned it: would He send an angel to teach me. And He said——"

"Oh, Addy, Addy . . ."

"He said, 'There she is. Your sister will teach you—if you look at her.' And He told me other things—not then, but at different times. That He loved me now better than before I had lost my W-I-T-S" (as before on her fingers, with cautious noddings), "and that you do, too. It must be true—isn't it true?"

"Oh, my love! my darling! my sister!—It is true

that I couldn't love you more than I do now: I love you better than anybody in all the world."

It was almost in a whisper that Berengaria said this, her plain deep eyes turned to the lovely, shallow eyes of her sister, her thin hand laid on Adelgitha's plump hand and pressing down upon it tenderly.

CHAPTER V

SIR JEREMY had broken to the sister-in-law whose word was almost his rule of life the news about the other sister-in-law whom he did not in truth much esteem: and, when he left the breakfast-table, he was still thinking of Lady Louisa and her return to their neighbourhood. To him it was interesting news, and news of any sort was welcome and not too common. The circumstances of their life at Boon Court had for seventeen years made it one of necessary seclusion: and he was a man fond of company and of gossip. Company, indoors, had been almost impossible, and gossip he had learned from Lady Berengaria to consider a thing beneath him and her brother-in-law. Still, he liked them. It seemed to him that now some degree of an intercourse that must be almost familiar would be inevitable between Boon Court and Wildspur Grange. That Lady Berengaria would ever be intimate with Lady Louisa he knew was out of the question: and he partly knew why, though he could not have ex-

plained it to anybody, or to himself, in words. He was conscious that the mistress of Boon Court never liked people of whom she did not approve, and he was equally conscious that she did not approve of the mistress of Wildspur Grange: and in a way he understood quite well the grounds of that never-expressed disapproval. Lady Louisa had always been a fast, rather loud woman, whose business in life had been amusement, and whose fashion of amusing herself had been mannish—almost noisy. No one had ever exactly spoken any scandal of her, but she was a lady of whom men talked much and familiarly, some declaring that she was a good fellow, others that she at all events “knew her way about.” The property at Wildspur was not important, but still it was an estate, with a village on it, entirely belonging to Lady Louisa for her lifetime, and since her husband’s death she had never been near it. She drew the rents—overdrew them too—but troubled herself not at all about her tenants, her villagers, or her poor people. To Lady Berengaria that seemed abominable. With all her heavy cares at home she made time for habitual, assiduous, and loving care of her own poor people—who were scattered through three villages and a hamlet, called Marder’s Common. She knew them all intimately, and they knew her, and were much the better for it. It was not only that she mitigated their poverty, and attended to their winter’s wants

and their sicknesses at all seasons; but they counted her a familiar friend, and they were not deceived. It is not easy to deceive the poor. They knew well that she was not proud, though many of a class nearer her own said all the de Bohuns were proud as Lucifer. Among her equals she was shy, thinking herself to be a dull woman not made for social amenities; but she was never shy among the poor folk, nor ever patronizing; only plainly simple and straightforward.

Lady Louisa's poor people thought badly of the gentry—greedy, selfish creatures, indifferent to all but rents and pleasure. And somehow Lady Berengaria knew that this was so: and of gentry, who gave occasion for such calumnious judgment of the class that Lady Berengaria believed to be almost the least selfish in England, she could not think well. Of Lady Louisa she never thought—when she could help it—at all.

Sir Jeremy did not imagine that any cordial relations could spring up between his two sisters-in-law. Nor did he fancy that Lady Berengaria would be pleased if any unnecessary intimacy should arise between Jacqueline and Lady Louisa. He did not think it would be allowed: for Jacqueline was almost more truly her aunt's daughter than she was his own, and his other sister-in-law was not Jacqueline's aunt, though she was Frederick's. As to Frederick, there would, thought Sir Jeremy, be little

question: he always did precisely what Aunt Berengaria, as he called her, liked: and a lad of Frederick's age might not care for great intimacy with another aunt, whom he had never seen, and whose tastes were not at all like his own.

What Sir Jeremy was really thinking of was himself. He would like another house to go to, especially a house, only four and a half miles away, with an Earl's daughter for its mistress. He thought more, very much more, of Earls than Berengaria did, and he had not her discrimination. Though she would never have dreamed of saying so, such Earls as Lord Hove were mere painful excrescences on the British Peerage. The first Lord Cruickshanks had been a man of no family and no character, the son of a Bishop who had owed his mitre to Lady Yarmouth, George II.'s mistress, and the Bishop's father had been a stud-groom. The third Lord had, by such gifts as commended themselves to the Prince Regent, acquired the favour of the First Gentleman in Europe (whom Lady Berengaria, loyalty itself as she was, could not regard as a gentleman at all), and, as King, George IV. had made the man an Earl. Any land the family had scraped up that first Earl had gambled away, and there had never been any since. The Earls of Hove were described in Peerages as resident at Cruickshanks House, Regency Crescent—in Brighton; but even of Cruickshanks House they had only a ninety-

nine years' lease, and it was often let. Sir Jeremy knew all this: but to him an Earl was an Earl. He knew well that Bohun Castle was like a royal residence, and that the de Bohuns had been Barons when Magna Charta was signed, had been Earls since Henry VI.'s days, that they quartered Plantagenet in their coat, and might, if they chose, have quartered the arms of Valois, of Castile, Leon and Aragon—only that they were too English. And it rejoiced him to think that his poor crazy wife had been a coheirress, and that Jacqueline would inherit the de Bohun arms and quarter Plantagenet too. The Cruickshanks arms weren't much, but still they had the same coronet over them, as had the present Earl of Lambeth: he didn't choose to forget that both his fathers-in-law had been Earls (he had never seen either), had been equally Right Honourable, and that the daughters of both had been Ladies, and Right Honourable too by courtesy. He only regretted the mock-modesty of modern custom that ignores the Right Honourableness of Earl's daughters; an inconsistent modesty, too, since the last-created Baron's sons and daughters are Honourable on their envelopes, if not on their visiting-cards. And also he regretted that his son's mother had not been a co-heiress (she and Lady Louisa had a brother, now Earl of Hove), so that Frederick could never quarter the Cruickshanks legs, embowed, proper with the pestles in saltire granted

by a supercilious Herald's College to Sir Jeremiah Joscelyn.

Poor Sir Jeremy! He did cast sheep's eyes at any mild pleasures that Wildspur Grange and Lady Louisa might bring within his reach—but he was half afraid of his deeply revered sister Berengaria.

CHAPTER VI

WHILE Sir Jeremy sat in his "study" ruminating these matters his wife and her sister were out driving. His son, who proposed to himself some academic distinctions, was really studying in the room that had been his schoolroom. Sir Jeremy did not read much, and when he was in his study he was usually writing letters. He wrote with prudent consideration, taking his time about them, and half a dozen letters would occupy his whole morning. He believed himself to be a busy man, and had, in fact, done nothing in particular for seventeen years.

When first he had come with his young wife to stay at Boon Court there had been the idea of adding considerably to Bracebourne Manor, and of course he and she were to go and live there—with Frederick, who had been in Lady Berengaria's charge during their long tour abroad. When Jacqueline was born, and her mother's mental state became what has been described, all plans of re-

moval to Bracebourne were set aside: she, her baby, her husband and his son all stayed on, permanently, at Boon Court, with its mistress to take wise care of them. Sir Jeremy had liked the arrangement, and he enjoyed living at Boon Court, which was a finer place, of greater consequence, than any he had ever expected to have for a home; and in some sense he was its master. All such matters as the master of a large establishment is supposed to manage were considered as being under his control; but, I think, Lady Berengaria's opinion really guided them. She certainly did not order the wines, or reprove erring footmen—not that the footmen at Boon Court were apt to err. Sir Jeremy ordered the wines, and liked writing the letters about them. Besides, he was a magistrate, and that he enjoyed immensely; and there was a thing he had liked still better while it lasted: for several years he had represented Rentchester in Parliament—at all events, he had not misrepresented it, for he had never once opened his mouth in the House except to correct a misstatement by another Honourable Member as to the age of King John at the date of the signing of Magna Charta. But, unfortunately, at the last General Election Rentchester had returned a talkative Liberal, and Sir Jeremy had lost his seat, and lost also the delightful necessity of spending certain months out of every year in London.

The Bracebourne estate gave him little or noth-

ing to do. On his wife's becoming an invalid, as it was gracefully called, the Trustees had assumed control; and a certain Mrs. John de Bohun had become tenant of the Manor. As she was a pious Catholic, and a conscientious woman of considerable means, Lady Berengaria had ever since been quite happy in her mind about the poor people round Bracebourne. And Mrs. de Bohun had been nearly as well pleased to reign at Bracebourne Manor, in the midst of an estate that had for centuries belonged to her late husband's family, as Sir Jeremy was to reign, if not to govern, at Boon Court.

"Berengaria," said Lady Adelgitha, as they were being driven home, "is that boy a Catholic?"

"Frederick? Certainly. A very good one."

"Oh!"

"He was only a year old when his father became a Catholic: of course Sir Jeremy would bring his child up in his own religion."

"And the other woman—Lady Hilda: didn't she mind? She used to be his mother, you know."

"Addy, dear, she was dead."

"Oh, dead! I knew somebody was. So *he* became a Catholic. What for?"

"Dear Addy: he became a Catholic when you and he were married—a little before, in fact."

"*I* see. That was the way of it."

For some time she said no more, but watched the

countless things in field and hedgerow, copse and spinney, that filled her eyes with a very different expression from that they showed when she chattered of people. She dearly loved her sister—loved her with an affection much deeper and more discerning than she had known in her days of sanity; but for no one else did she care very much. Her husband, her own child, and his son, she held in a sort of vaguely critical disregard.

But while Adelgitha with keen glance noted every patch of lights and shadow, every hint of coming colour on the still bare trees and bushes, Berengaria's conscience was not easy.

"Addy," she said presently, "Sir Jeremy is a very good Catholic. Perhaps he might never have become one but for you, but he is a most sincere Catholic now—for many, many years: most devout; a very good man."

"'But for me!' I've had nothing to do with it. It's all your doing: and you've done wonders. Not that he could help himself—he couldn't live at Boon Court and be anything else. You wouldn't stand it."

"But how if I couldn't help it?" And Berengaria laughed a little.

"Tut! If the butler or one of the footmen was a bad Catholic he'd have to go."

"Oh, Addy"—and her sister blushed—"but he is my brother."

"That's nonsense. We never had a brother. He'd be a de Bohun if he was our brother. He's—Joscelyn: isn't that his name? But you've done wonders. I'll tell you what you've done: you've very nearly made him a gentleman."

Berengaria's blush deepened, and a look of great pain came into her patient eyes.

"Oh, Addy, Addy!" she said, in a low, shocked voice.

"Well, it's true. You've made a silk purse out of a sow's ear—almost. Do you know he was very handsome once? Perhaps you never heard."

"He always was a handsome man," said her sister who was not at all given to talking of people's appearance, but was eagerly glad now to talk of anything so indifferent as mere looks, "and he is still."

"Oh, you think so! But I'll tell you. He has all the usual things—hair, eyes, nose, mouth, chin, etc.—and they're all well enough, but they don't *make up* anything between them all. They're higgledy-piggledy, and don't mean anything. There's nothing behind them. I get sick of seeing them. I never get tired of you: you were always a plain girl——"

"Yes, dear, always," interrupted Berengaria with serene conviction.

"Quite true. But you're not tiresome to look at. That's an ugly tree; but I always like to look at it:

it means something—it is bending down, and has a load on its back, and it won't break under it—never, never, never! It goes on with its leaves every year, though they're not much and nobody's going to admire them. That other tree is shaped all right, and means nothing whatever. *You* do. So I find it interesting to watch you; but Sir Thingummy bores me to death: did you ever slap him?"

"Addy, Addy!"

"No? I wish you would. If it was my house I would, but one can't slap one's fellow-guests. You needn't be afraid: of course one can't. I shall always behave. But those two cheeks—like dough—how I should like to see one of them red, and his hand up stroking it."

Berengaria was almost beside herself: she knew well that a most ordinary effect of reason gone astray is a strong repulsion against those who should be and have been dearest, but that did not make it more tolerable to her to hear her brother-in-law thus spoken of by his wife with ruthlessly indifferent criticism. She had not desired to have him for a brother, or in her heart thought him fitted by birth or breeding to be her sister's husband; there had been nothing about him to attract her regard or challenge her respect, and she had not been edified to hear that "he would not mind changing"—would be quite willing to turn Catholic

in order to marry Lady Adelgitha de Bohun. But all that was eighteen years ago: during more than seventeen he had lived under her roof, sat at her table, and worshipped God in the same church with herself. His children had been in truth her children; even she must have known that he did not love them as she did. But he loved them as much as it was in his nature to love, with all due manifestations of parental affection and all proper sense of parental duty to them. And (though that she neither saw nor would see) she had, in fact, done wonders for him. No well-disposed man could have lived thus close to her for many years and not been improved; and he was well disposed—a man with no vicious leanings, but respectable, truthful in all weighty matters, though prone to small, shallow secrets, and now religious. The religion had, humanly speaking, been all her doing; but such human speaking was hateful to herself. The growth in him of which she was fully conscious was due, she herself knew, to the steady practice of religion, to the habit of a good life, and the regular reception of great Sacraments.

Lady Berengaria did not like what is called Natural Religion; and there had been nothing of that sort to dislike in Sir Jeremy. It pleased her much better that he had grown to be a religious man by eighteen years of Catholicity.

She was a woman to whom it would have been

terrible if she could not have respected an inmate of her own house, a member by adoption of her own family; and she could respect her brother-in-law without any violence to common sense or sincerity. As the father of Frederick and Jacqueline he was even dear to her—almost.

"Addy," she said gravely, "you are hurting me. I respect and regard him."

"Oh!"

There was a brief pause; then, as they drove in at the lodge gates, and Lady Adelgitha nodded and smiled with pleasant graciousness at the woman who had opened them, she added cheerfully:

"I'm sure I'm always most civil to him. You needn't be afraid: I always shall be. *We* needn't quarrel about him, need we? He's nothing to us—*Sir Jeremy Joscelyn!*"

She could be very obstinate, and the emphasis with which she pronounced the name that was, in fact, her own was eloquent of disdain and of obstinacy in her slighting opinion.

CHAPTER VII

As they entered the hall Sir Jeremy met them, and Lady Adelgitha was all smiles and graciousness. In the days of her sanity she might thus have borne herself to some acquaintance whom circumstances threw into a sort of appearance of intimacy with

her family, whom social convention placed on a footing of equality with herself, and who had done nothing to demand an enlightenment on her part as to such equality being purely a polite fiction.

"We have had a delightful drive," she said. "I hope you have been out."

"No, my dear. I had letters to write."

"Ah! You should have gone out: I'm afraid it will rain after luncheon."

And, with nods and smiles, she passed across the hall and went upstairs.

"Berengaria," said Sir Jeremy, "Jacqueline is coming home."

"At once?"

"Yes. There came a telegram five minutes after you and Addy went out: she said she would be at Helsly at 12.25, and I sent the brougham to meet her. I should have gone with it, only I thought it would be better for me to see you first and tell you she was coming home."

Sir Jeremy's manner was a little fidgety; his sister-in-law never was fidgety, but his news had to some extent surprised her.

They were now standing by the fire in his study.

"Does Frederick know?" she asked.

"Yes. He has gone to meet her."

"I'm glad of that. I shouldn't like her to have found no one at the station."

"It's rather sudden," said Sir Jeremy, "but I

suppose she made up her mind she had no vocation. You were right, you see, as usual."

Lady Berengaria was not given to pluming herself on being right.

"I wasn't sure that she had a vocation," she answered, looking down into the fire, "that was all. And I didn't think *she* was really sure. I must go up and get my things off."

And she went away at once.

Quarter of an hour later the two ladies and Sir Jeremy were in the drawing-room, and Lady Adelgitha was rather impatient for the announcement of luncheon. Her appetite was always excellent, especially when she had been out. The flightiness she had shown at breakfast was gone, and she looked, and almost spoke, like any other lady who had nothing to trouble her but a little hunger.

"It's half-past one," she remarked, with a glance at the clock on the chimney-piece.

"Yes, dear. We are waiting for Jacqueline and Frederick. They will be down in a moment."

"I thought you said she was away."

"She has been away, but she came home just now. Frederick fetched her from the station. Here they are."

The door opened and they came in together. Jacqueline was tall, like her mother and her aunt, and she had points of resemblance to both, but was really like neither. Her figure was slim but not

thin, her eyes were brown, and dark like Berengaria's, but they were larger, and had a quick movement; her complexion had not her mother's dazzling fairness, but it was clear and brilliant. Her mouth had the sensitiveness of her aunt's, and some of the obstinacy of her mother's. Her ears were delicate and very small, unlike either her mother's or her aunt's; and her nose was straight, regular, and finely cut. Her hair, though abundant, soft, and rich, like Lady Adelgitha's, was much darker, and had no curl in it; still it had the same golden lights towards the ends. Her hands were more beautiful than her mother's—Lady Berengaria's hands were not beautiful at all. Jacqueline was then seventeen, and might have passed for nineteen.

The moment she entered the room her eyes met her aunt's with a radiant smile, full of deep affection, and she turned them at once to her father's, giving him the same smiling greeting; but it was to her mother she went straight. Kneeling down by her side, she took her hands and kissed them, and then lifted her face to be kissed.

"Dear mamma!" she whispered.

"A pretty creature!" cried Lady Adelgitha, smiling and giving the kiss, but appealing to Berengaria as if her sister's opinion mattered more than any feeling of her own.

"Dear mamma!" said the girl again, kissing her

mother's cheek—that was really turned from her to her aunt.

"But you should go to *her*," said Adelgitha; "she is your real mother. Why don't you go to her?"

The look of pain came again into Berengaria's eyes, and the expression of tender, gentle misery was on her poor mouth. But no one said anything, and the girl did not rise from her knees by her mother or cease fondling her hands.

It never struck Sir Jeremy that his wife never bade his daughter go to *him*.

Adelgitha was hungry, and was getting cross.

"Go to Berengaria," she said imperiously, drawing her hands away from her child. "Where have you been? It's more than half-past one."

"I have been away for months," the girl answered in a low voice, "and now I have come home. I come to you first. Dear, dear mamma!"

"She's a pretty creature," said her mother, with querulous impatience, not looking at her, but at Berengaria, "but selfish. I want my luncheon."

Then the girl stood up, slowly rising, and a slow flush creeping over her face.

"It's twenty-to-two," said her mother, slightly shaking out her soft silky draperies. "How long have you been away?"

"Five months."

"Staying with people for five months! What a visit! Who were they?"

Jacqueline was not looking at her aunt, but at her mother.

"Nuns," she answered plainly, in low tones.

"Nuns! What on earth were you doing with nuns for five months?"

"I wanted to be one. I went to see if I could be one——"

"A nun! *You* a nun! And what did Berengaria say?"

"I don't think she approved, though she never said so," the girl answered, almost in a whisper.

"And you went off to be a nun, in spite of her? Berengaria, she must be a bad girl—— And I want my luncheon."

"Luncheon is served, my lady!" announced the butler, throwing the door wide open.

If Porter had been listening at the door, which most certainly he had not, he could not have chosen his moment better.

"*Apropos!*" cried Lady Adelgitha, rising with cheerful alacrity. "Come, Berengaria!"

She went across the room and took her sister by the arm—not without a bow and a civil smile to Sir Jeremy—and marched her off to the dining-room, leaving her husband and his children to follow as they chose, or to stop behind: to her it was perfectly indifferent.

"Berengaria," she whispered on the way, "I don't much like your Miss Jacqueline. Pretty!

More than pretty! But not dutiful. Headstrong, eh? Take care, or she'll bother you."

As soon as she had something to eat she bowed and smiled down the table to Sir Jeremy.

"You should have gone out," she said politely. "I'm as hungry as a hunter. Writing letters never gives one an appetite."

Then she shot a queer glance at her sister: discreet, but with an innuendo.

"Ain't I pretty behaved?" it said. "He's nothing to *us*. You like him, and we are never to quarrel over *him*."

In all these years she had never been uncourteous to her husband, though she disliked him; and he, by a merciful disposition of Providence, had never suspected the dislike. A thick skin and an absence of intuition had been vouchsafed to him.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR JEREMY had taken it for granted that there would be no intimacy between his sister-in-law at Wildspur Grange and his sister-in-law at Boon Court, or between the former and his daughter; but he hoped to find some relaxation for himself in fairly frequent visits to Lady Louisa.

"Shall you call?" he asked Lady Berengaria.

"Oh, certainly. But perhaps you had better do so first and explain that Addy goes nowhere."

He was well pleased with this arrangement, and resolved to go very soon indeed after Lady Louisa should have arrived.

"She is not coming till the twentieth," he observed, as if there were no hurry.

This was on the fifteenth.

But, as it turned out, Jacqueline was the first to see Lady Louisa.

On the afternoon of the nineteenth she rode, with a groom in attendance, to visit a poor woman who was ill at the hamlet called Marder's Common. The morning had been showery, and her mother and aunt had stayed indoors; after luncheon they drove together.

Marder's Common was six miles from Boon Court, and on the way home Jacqueline called to the groom and said:

"I believe the mare has cast a shoe. I want to see."

The man dismounted, and she did so too.

"Yes, miss," he said. "I think it's the off hind shoe."

And so it turned out. While they were examining the mare's foot a lady in a dog-cart came along, with her groom seated beside her. She pulled up, and the man got down, going at once to the horse's head—a smart, showy-looking beast, more like a hunter than a carriage hack.

"Is anything the matter?" the lady called out in

a clear, rather loud voice. "But I can see for myself. Your mare has lost a shoe. There's a blacksmith at our village—Coldspur: it's less than a mile off, round there." And she pointed with her whip.

"Yes, I know," said Jacqueline. "We shall have to go there . . ."

"Let your groom take her," the lady suggested instantly, "and bring her with the shoes on to my house for you. I live in there, behind those trees; that's my lodge gate. Do come and wait there: we're going to have another shower—a pelter, I think. And it's not half a mile to my house. James, let down the back flap." And she herself stood up for the seat to be moved forward.

She spoke with a quick air of decision, and, as the arrangement was sensible and convenient, and Jacqueline had no objection to it, she smiled and thanked the lady, and got up beside her.

"When the mare's shod, bring her to Wildspur Grange," said the lady to Jacqueline's groom, with as much easy authority as if he had been her own servant. "You know the place?"

"Yes, my lady."

Then they drove off.

"This horse nearly pulls your arms out of their sockets," observed the lady, "and I suppose he wants his tea. I want mine. And you, I hope,

want yours. Your groom seems to know who I am: do you?"

"I think you are Lady Louisa Raffham."

"Yes. I've been such a wicked absentee that I didn't see why anyone should know who I was. And that's why I don't know who you are."

"My name is Jacqueline Joscelyn."

They were just turning in at Lady Louisa's lodge gate, and the Grange almost immediately came into sight: a middling-sized, Georgian house, lying low in a small park like a group of paddocks.

"Joscelyn!" cried Lady Louisa, turning to look at her neighbour. "Then I suppose you're Sir Jeremy's daughter: not that you're in the least like him, unless I've forgotten him altogether."

"Yes; he is my father."

"Well, now! how odd that you should be the first person I should meet here! You're almost my niece, you know. At all events, your brother is my step-nephew."

Jacqueline laughed a little.

"Is *he* like you?" asked Lady Louisa.

"No, not at all, I think. He is more like my father."

"Stupid boy!" said Lady Louisa, with unbridled candour. "He should have taken after you."

"He came into the world before me," Jacqueline reminded her new friend, laughing again. "It

would be more my business to take after him. But he is anything but stupid: he is very clever."

"Goodness! How alarming! Does he ask for a second help in Greek?"

"He doesn't often ask for a second help," Jacqueline replied; "he is not a very big eater."

"Worse and worse. Boys are naturally greedy. I like natural boys."

"But he is not *quite* a boy: he left school at Christmas, and is going to Oxford at Easter. He is nineteen, and almost a man."

"How terrible! A man at nineteen. Here we are. James, just ring, will you? I've no proper butler yet (I only arrived the night before last), and the caretaker's husband is acting butler. He keeps the front-door locked lest anyone should walk off with the Turkey carpet in the hall. I wish someone would; it has a hole in it that trips you up. I nearly broke my nose going out."

"Perhaps your butler is like Aunt Pullet," said Jacqueline.

"Aunt Pullet! I thought your aunt was Lady Berengaria de Bohun!"

Jacqueline laughed once more.

"I was quoting," she explained. "Maggie Tulliver's Aunt Pullet in *The Mill on the Floss*; she kept her front-door in a fortified condition for fear of tramps, who might be supposed to know of the glass case of stuffed birds in the hall, and to

contemplate rushing in and carrying it away on their heads."

"Goodness!" said Lady Louisa, preparing to descend. "How literary! You must be almost as bad as your brother—Alfred, isn't it?"

The caretaker's husband had really been butler during the régime of her ladyship's last tenants, and he looked highly respectable. Lady Louisa told him to bring tea immediately.

"This is my sitting-room," she said, leading the way into a good-sized and very comfortable room. "The drawing-room isn't out of curl-papers yet. I shall tackle it to-morrow. I only came the day before yesterday, and I set to work on this first because it is smaller, and would be less trouble. I always do the easiest things first—lest the Day of Judgment should come and one should have had all one's trouble for nothing. You never know."

No one could look as if the thought of the Day of Judgment bothered her less than Lady Louisa. Lady Berengaria, who lived in the constant remembrance of it, never alluded to it in casual conversation.

"It is a very pretty room," said Jacqueline, looking round.

"Pretty? No; but I've tried to make it decent. It was quite awful when I began yesterday morning."

The paper on the walls had never been very

pretty, but it was now faded and was not, at all events, obtrusive: the colour was at present of a dull maroon (it had once been almost magenta), but the big fire of blazing logs warmed it and brought out a pleasant glow here and there in it.

The actual furniture was old and almost shabby, but Lady Louisa had rearranged it all, and on the big sofa had thrown an enormous rug of some handsome brown fur; on the tables, some of which she had covered with beautiful Turkish cloths of soft ruddy silk, she had put quantities of hyacinths in large, shallow copper pots, and also numbers of things that Jacqueline thought looked interesting—little paintings in rich Florentine frames, quaint vases of jade or china, and countless other odds and ends that their owner had picked up all over Europe, and in the Levant too. Though they had only occupied their present places for a day, they seemed to Jacqueline to have the air of having been there always.

"All the same, I'm glad you flatter my room by calling it pretty," said Lady Louisa. "I like having all these rubbishes about me, because they remind me of the places where I bought them. Unfortunately, one can't hunt in the summer, and I always go abroad. Here's tea."

Presently she said again:

"How odd that you should be my first visitor! You know. I was not to have arrived till to-mor-

row, but I always come before my time or a week late. I'm glad I wasn't a week late this time, or I shouldn't be giving you tea now."

Her manner was almost abrupt, but it was cordial and, somehow, flattering.

"I am fortunate, anyway," said Jacqueline, evidently meaning it. "Of course, my aunt would come to see you, but my father was to come first to find if you were ready for visitors, and you might not have been in when she called, and we might have been out when you came over to see her—or I might have been out."

"It is nearly eight years since I saw your father, and I can hardly remember seeing you at all."

"I was only nine then. But I remember seeing you once—you were riding: I think you had been hunting, and were coming home."

"And you—do you always stay down here? Or do you go to London every year?"

"I have very seldom been to London. Father used to go when he was in Parliament. But we always live here. Mamma loves the country, and Aunt Berengaria hates London."

The girl mentioned her mother with a simplicity that almost puzzled Lady Louisa: surely she must know that her mother was mad? But Lady Louisa was not stupid, and she presently understood that in that quiet mention of her mother's love for the country the girl had known what she was about.

"And you? Does it never bore you living always in such a quiet place?"

"I have never been bored in my life. And certainly the country would never bore me. I love it, too, though I am not clever, as mamma is, about it. When she is industrious she paints most exquisitely beautiful pictures—just a tree or two, a bit of broken ground with an old gravel-pit and a pool in it, sometimes only a bare branch with sky showing through it, but always with more beauty and meaning in them than anything I could imagine till I see her drawing; then it all dawns on me, the wonderful plain loveliness and the significance of it."

"Has she ever painted your portrait?"

"Oh no! She doesn't care for drawing people."

"If I could paint I should want to draw your picture."

Jacqueline seemed hardly to detect the very outspoken compliment, and Lady Louisa felt almost snubbed.

"Your mother," she said in a very different tone, "is your heroine. I can see that."

"Yes," the girl answered simply.

To Lady Louisa it was amazing. Sir Jeremy, in his occasional letters, had barely ventured to mention his wife; and, of course, she had known of it. But this girl seemed determined to speak of her mother as any other daughter (who happened to

adore her mother) might; and yet it seemed clear to Lady Louisa that Jacqueline was no fool, but a clever girl. She found something touching, almost tragic, in it. No doubt the crazy woman idolized her beautiful daughter, and perhaps that blinded her.

"You must be all in all to each other," she said.

It was not a cruel attempt to fish out information, but sincerely, if thoughtlessly, said; but the words were not out of her mouth before she saw that they had touched a wound. Jacqueline merely smiled, but a painful flush came into her cheeks, and her frank eyes dropped. All her life she had been trying not to know that her mother was, at best, indifferent to her.

CHAPTER IX

"My lady," said the butler, coming in with a lamp, "Miss Joscelyn's groom has come from the village, and he says that the blacksmith is out, and will not be back for an hour."

"Well, give him some tea, and then let him go back; and tell them to send the brougham round at once. I will take you safe home, and deliver you at your own door," Lady Louisa said to Jacqueline. "If you don't turn up soon they will be dragging the ponds for you."

And in spite of Jacqueline's protests she stuck to

this, and did drive her home; but she absolutely refused to get out, and drove off the moment she saw the girl go in at the door of Boon Court.

Sir Jeremy was himself out, and Frederick was with him. Lady Adelgitha was up in her rooms, and only Lady Berengaria had been wondering why Jacqueline was so late. She was just beginning to be anxious when her niece walked in and explained matters.

Lady Berengaria was certainly not delighted. Accidents, we are informed proverbially, will occur in the best regulated families; but she did not pin her faith on proverbial wisdom, and such an accident as a cast shoe she was half inclined to ascribe to some carelessness or negligence somewhere. And she did not particularly rejoice in a prospect of grateful intimacy with Wildspur Grange. All the same, she was sure Lady Louisa should not have been allowed to drive off unthanked.

"You ought to have made her come in," she said. "It was most kind of her to take so much trouble, and I am ashamed not to have thanked her."

"Yes. I knew you would scold me: I suppose she didn't want to be thanked. Anyway, she insisted on going off."

"Jacqueline, dear, I wasn't scolding you." (Lady Berengaria never did scold anybody.) "Only it

seems ungrateful. Your father was to have gone over to her first: a gentleman's visit is less formal, and he is—connected with her. Some ladies don't care for very prompt visits before they are *installées*: but now I must go to-morrow."

"Oh, she is quite *installée*; her room is charming, and looks as if she had been living in it for half a dozen years."

That was just what Lady Berengaria thought she ought to have been doing, and she perfectly understood the glance that Jacqueline cast round the drawing-room where they were standing. It was a very large room, and a fine one, hung with a rich pea-green damask brocade; the pictures were few, but by famous masters and of great value; and the furniture was valuable, too, and all of one period, harmonious with itself. Still, it was all rather gaunt. The splendid inlaid tables were certainly not crowded with knick-knacks: the sort of medley of pretty trifles that Lady Louisa had called her rubbishes, while professing affection for them, Lady Berengaria would regard as really rubbish, and with anything but affection. Lady Adelgitha's own sitting-room upstairs was full of flowers that she had picked for herself in the gardens and hot-houses, but there were not often flowers in the drawing-room. Lady Berengaria did not give much thought to such matters, but, so far as she thought at all about it, her idea was that recep-

tion-rooms in a big house should not look like boudoirs.

"I will go over and call to-morrow," she said.

"And may I go with you?"

As Jacqueline had been drinking tea with Lady Louisa that afternoon her aunt did not think this necessary, but she said:

"Oh yes, if you would like to. Of course you may."

Then Sir Jeremy and Frederick came in, and heard of Jacqueline's little adventure: it almost seemed an adventure there at Boon Court, where life moved at an unbroken pace of ordered monotony. Lady Berengaria loved regularity, and was not fond of exceptional occurrences: indeed, her own life had been full of weighty duties which could only have been performed, as they ever had been, without bustle or hurry, by method and order.

Sir Jeremy was secretly delighted at this uncovenanted mercy: he desired a sort of intimacy with Wildspur, and Jacqueline's small adventure seemed likely to smooth the way to it. But he did not say much.

"What is Lady Louisa like?" asked Frederick.

She was his aunt, and Lady Berengaria was not, but he had always called the latter "Aunt Berengaria": still, Lady Louisa was a stranger, and it was not altogether strange that as yet he only spoke of the mistress of Wildspur by her title. Besides,

he had an inward satisfaction in the sound of it—it was a reminder that his own mother had also been an Earl's daughter. In some things he was like his father, though he had more brains and had always been studious.

"She is very pleasant," answered Jacqueline, who thought there was a critical tone in the inquiry—"very pleasant indeed. She talks in an off-hand way, almost like an amusing girl."

Her aunt remembered perfectly that Lady Louisa was over fifty: to talk like a girl, an off-hand girl, at fifty-two did not strike her as a desirable accomplishment.

"She has a great deal of taste," Jacqueline continued. (And Lady Berengaria, if she had known of it, would have quoted to herself the Oxford don's saying concerning that other Oxford don: "Oh yes! a great deal of taste, and all so very bad.") "She has a great deal of taste," said Jacqueline. "Her room is the nicest one I was ever in, and she arranged it all herself. It is full of quaint and pretty things she picked up for sixpence all over the world."

Jacqueline's aunt shuddered—not visibly, but with deep inward abhorrence. A room like a broker's shop would make her flesh creep. How could she bear it if Jacqueline were to buy spotted pottery dogs off cottage chimney-pieces, and sow

them broadcast over the Boule tables and cabinets at Boon Court?

"What is she like to look at?" asked Frederick.

"Oh! I wasn't thinking of her looks."

That Lady Berengaria thoroughly approved.

"Lady Louisa is not very young," she observed calmly, as if good looks and fifty-two had nothing to do with one another.

Sir Jeremy, who was several years older than Lady Louisa, made an interior protest.

"No," said Jacqueline, "I suppose not. But she is slim, and moves and talks so quickly, that you don't think of her as at all old."

"Your aunt is not by any means an old woman," Sir Jeremy remarked—"hardly past the prime of life."

To call Lady Louisa Jacqueline's aunt was certainly a slip of the tongue, as he felt at once. But he was so used to hearing his son so call that sister-in-law of his own, who was no relation to the boy, that it was not very unnatural he should think of the other sister-in-law as his daughter's aunt. Lady Berengaria thoroughly understood, and did not resent it; but it made her uncomfortable. There was nothing she desired less than an aunt for Jacqueline at Wildspur Grange. "Aunt" on the lips of both Frederick and Jacqueline had meant almost "mother."

Jacqueline herself laughed a little.

"Lady Louisa said," she told them, "that I was almost her niece."

This annoyed Lady Berengaria much more than Sir Jeremy's slip of the tongue: he had meant no harm, and then he was her brother. To be rigidly critical of those of her own household was never her weakness. But Lady Louisa was an objectionable stranger. When that stranger claimed a sort of relationship with her own niece, who was so much more to her than a mere niece, it was objectionable. It meant a resolved attempt at intimacy.

Berengaria did not for a moment suppose that Lady Louisa could do any harm to herself, or would think of doing any harm to Jacqueline; but she was sure that intimacy with Lady Louisa would do Jacqueline no good. And this was not stupidity or narrow-mindedness, but only a perfectly sound and sane instinct.

Each of her three companions was aware of her feeling, for, though she was a woman very slow to push forward such private impressions of her own, or force them loudly on others, she was also incapable of disguise. She was as sincere in manner as in speech: in both she was somewhat reserved, but it was the reserve of quietness, and not that of cold intention.

Jacqueline loved her aunt and foster-mother truly and very deeply, and did not care sixpence for

Lady Louisa Raffham, but she thought the latter pleasant and the former prejudiced.

Sir Jeremy could not in his heart believe Lady Louisa's intimate friendship thoroughly desirable for his daughter, though he lacked Lady Berengaria's sound instinct; but he wanted an open door for himself to Wildspur Grange, and was glad that Jacqueline seemed likely to help to open that door.

Frederick had never heard much good of Lady Louisa (he went about more than any of the others, and had open ears for unconsidered trifles of talk), and he thought all good of his Aunt Berengaria. He had not the smallest intention of sacrificing one iota of his Boon Court loyalty to any strange Wildspur gods; but he rather liked to remember that his own real aunt was a Lady Louisa, and he did not imagine that there would be anything like a veto on such mildly intimate relations as he thought of for himself. If Jacqueline should want to rush into a fierce friendship of which their Aunt Berengaria disapproved he would be all on the Boon Court side.

He even said a word as he and his sister walked upstairs to dress for dinner.

"I'm glad you liked her," he observed in a disengaged manner. "Of course, she is my mother's sister——"

"Half-sister. She spoke of that."

"But"—and perhaps the interruption affected his

tone a little—"I don't suppose she's much in our line."

"Not much in yours, I think," said Jacqueline, recalling his aunt's allusions to himself.

"Aren't we all in the same line here?"

"I don't know what you mean exactly by 'line'; it was your word, not mine. I think we are each of us pretty much in our own 'line.' We're all rather different from each other."

"We are all of us Catholics."

"Oh, of course. I don't fancy Lady Louisa will talk much to me about religion."

"Religion is certainly not *her* line."

"How do you know?" asked his sister, with plain displeasure. She did not, herself, imagine that Lady Louisa was a person much addicted to piety, but it annoyed her to hear him speak thus of a lady whose hospitality she had so lately been enjoying. "You know no more about her than I do. Less, probably. She may be a devout Mahomedan for all I know."

"We are not Mahomedans."

"Oh dear!"

"You know what I mean perfectly well."

"Yes. I know that you want to put me on my guard—against your mother's sister—half-sister, I mean. Because she hunts, and we don't——"

"I do hunt."

"You tell her that you do! You've been out three times since you came home from school."

"You know very well I have been busy——"

"Oh, Frederick! I'm sure I don't care whether you hunt six days a week, or never hunt at all."

"But you spoke as though my hunting seldom was something against me."

"Did I? I meant that Lady Louisa would not think anyone who went out three or four times in a season a hunting man——"

"A hunting man! That's different——"

"Exactly, don't let us argue about it."

"Who is arguing?—not you, of course."

"Perhaps we both are, and all about nothing. What I was trying to say was that we are not hunting people, and Lady Louisa is a hunting person—so she is to be disapproved of."

"Aunt Berengaria is certainly not a hunting person, and I don't fancy she would like you to become one. We must dress; there's the first gong."

And he took cover in his own room, having secured the last word.

CHAPTER X

FREDERICK had managed to get the last word, but his sister continued the argument in silence while she was dressing, and defeated him; this is always easier to do, when we arrange for ourselves the

things to be urged by our opponents in discussion.

Jacqueline had not in the least made up her mind to any fierce friendship with Lady Louisa Raffham, but she thought her aunt prejudiced, and she almost accused her brother of meanness in that he seemed quite prepared to take sides against his own aunt. He was making, she thought, a storm in a teacup.

The brother and sister were very unlike, in appearance as in character. He was short and thick-set; and, though his face had more expression than his father's, it was much less handsome. Sir Jeremy and he were both dark, but Frederick's nearly black hair was lank and ugly, and his eyes were small and inquisitive. His mouth was firm, which Sir Jeremy's was not, but the thin lips were obstinate, as was the short chin and also the square jaw.

Jacqueline was rather wilful and wayward than obstinate, and she was a creature of moods and impulses. Her brother seemed to have but one mood, of quiet, well-regulated self-complacence. He had been thoroughly well brought up, and he was conscientious; he acted on principles of which he was fully aware—and they were good principles. He was not wilful or wayward, though he mostly did what he had decided for himself that he would do. His conduct at school had been exemplary, but he had not been particularly well liked.

Jacqueline was sometimes full of buoyant spirits;

at others, full of a sadness that was not the less real because it arose from causes of which she could not easily have given account. She was eager, and did not much admire moderation, while her brother thought moderation was a cardinal virtue. He seldom made mistakes, and she made half a dozen a week. Her temper was really sweeter than his, but she was passionate, and he was always calm and reasonable. Her heart was full of warmth and tenderness, and his was cool—not exactly cold, but obedient to the prudent control he held it in, and that control was easy.

When their Aunt Berengaria wrote to him, at school, in the previous autumn, that his sister was going within a week or two to enter a convent of contemplative nuns as a postulant, he had at once perceived that Jacqueline was making one of her mistakes—and by far the most important she had yet perpetrated. He clearly understood that she was acting with wayward wilfulness on a sudden impulse, and he did not in the least believe that she had a real vocation. Exactly what had happened he did not quite make out, either from Berengaria's letter, from his father's on the next day, or from Jacqueline's own, that read almost like a farewell.

One day in October Jacqueline had told her aunt that she had written to a convent to say that she was coming there to make a Retreat. Lady Berengaria did not even hint that it would have been better had

she spoken of her intention before writing; she did not in the least accuse her niece, in her own mind, of meaning any slight or of having somewhat failed of kindness. She quite understood that the girl merely wanted to carry out her plan without discussion.

"I suppose Father Ridgway knows," she observed; and Lady Berengaria never said "I suppose" such a thing when she really meant the opposite.

"No; I haven't told him yet."

Father Ridgway was Jacqueline's confessor, and it is not usual for a penitent to go into Retreat without the confessor's advice. But the whole thing was simply her own idea.

However, she made her Retreat, and only returned to tell her father and her aunt that she was resolved to be a nun: not in the convent where she had just been, but in one of a much more austere order of strict contemplatives. Sir Jeremy was surprised, but he did not say much. He knew that his wife's aunt and Berengaria's was a nun, and there was no reason obvious to him why his daughter should not become one too—if she had a vocation: as to that he couldn't, of course, tell.

Neither did Berengaria say much, but she prayed a great deal; it was much safer to speak to God than to anyone else. He knew, and she did not. If she could have trusted her own opinion she would have

felt certain that Jacqueline had no vocation to this life of cloistered religion; but she was really a humble woman, not deeming herself clever or possessed of any special insight—not, indeed, doing justice to her own sound common-sense and sane instinct. By her own conscience, and God's light on it, she knew she had to guide her own conduct, but she never imagined that her conscience was to be imposed on another human being. She had once greatly longed to be a nun herself, but the duties God had seemed to put manifestly in her way had convinced her that her vocation was to do them. That was no reason why He should not give this high grace of vocation to "Holy Religion" to another soul, and He does not bind Himself to act according to our dim light.

Many and many an hour that loving, brave-hearted woman, simple and honest as ever a woman was, prayed before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel at Boon Court, long after every eye but her own was closed in sleep. And all her prayer came to this, that God's will might be done—that no girlish petulance should thwart it, and no chill counsel of elderly prudence.

Of dictatorial advice to Jacqueline she gave none; and for that silence the girl was, and remained, deeply grateful. She knew her aunt to be immeasurably better than herself, and wiser, and of much deeper religious experience; yet she did not want

to be advised—unless her aunt, or her confessor, would advise her to do as she had resolved, and that neither did. For their abstinence from adverse counsel she inwardly thanked them.

Berengaria remembered well her young aunt's departure to be a nun. And it was not Jacqueline's moods to frequent gaiety and pleasure-seeking that made her doubtful and apprehensive. Lady Gwendolen had been light-hearted and prone to fun and laughter, fond of amusement, and perhaps a little vain of her prettiness. But from the first moment that she had shyly whispered her dawning desire to be a nun, Berengaria had never doubted her vocation, nor had her father, nor had the girl's confessor. It had been a steady, almost visible growth. As some girls prettily drop their little vanities and self-preoccupation after marriage, when their babies come, so had it been with Lady Gwendolen as her vocation grew and strengthened in her. She never lost her identity, or became solemn, important, dull, or tedious; her laugh was not less merry, nor her sense of fun and queerness blunted, but a greater light came and swallowed up the lesser lights, and all her nature deepened, and grew finer, wider, and more complete.

Poor Jacqueline, during the few days she spent at home between her Retreat and her departure to become a postulant, was impatient, almost irritably anxious to be gone, and quite unable to resume any

real interest in the life around her. Her aunt could not help remembering how different her father's sister had been during the last weeks before she, too, had left the old home at Bohun Castle. She had been brighter than ever, but also more tender and loving than ever, sharing in every home duty and home pleasure to the last, and going about to make farewell visits among all the humble friends she had known all her short life—not with wistful regret, but as a girl does who is about to make a marriage that will take her to some distant place.

Jacqueline almost shut herself up, as though she were a cloistered nun already, and would hardly go to see any of the poor people. It was as if she said, "I am not going to be a Sister of Charity; my life will not be among the poor." She wanted to make no farewells, and it seemed as if she had in this an austere purpose.

Berengaria did not judge her, though to her it seemed all a mistake. On the contrary, she reminded herself how the Master Himself had said, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead." She could not, even in her own mind, dictate to one, whom He might be calling, in what fashion she should go.

During those days Jacqueline's mother had been in one of her bad states, her memory too clouded to recognize anyone but Berengaria, and she had known nothing of her daughter's departure. This

the poor girl's aunt had seen was the great trial of Jacqueline's fortitude: and the fortitude was shown, but she could not attain it without a certain austerity and hardness that altered her. She could not let herself be soft and gentle lest she should break down altogether, so that to her father and her aunt she seemed almost cold, as though she were already counting them as dead to her. Sir Jeremy thought it might be the right thing—he had no experience, and the indolence of his nature made him prone to suppose things were taking their proper course. To Berengaria it did not seem natural or right, but she could not tell. God might be calling the girl by ways above her own meagre comprehension. She could only pray; and she knew that the kind old priest would be praying too. To him she could say very little, partly because it was not her nature to discuss people, and also because she remembered that he was not only her own confessor, but Jacqueline's.

“Do you think,” Sir Jeremy had asked her, “that she will be able to bear the austerities—it is a very hard order, isn't it?”

“Yes, it is hard. Certainly she will be able to bear them if she has this vocation.”

To Lady Berengaria it seemed a matter of course that one of their class should be able to endure any mere physical hardship if it were a duty. That was her *natural* feeling: from the *supernatural* point of

view the material austerities of a contemplative nun's life were only helps, means to a certain end which could hardly be gained without them.

CHAPTER XI

JACQUELINE had gone to be a postulant, and in the order she wished to join the postulancy lasted six months; then would follow a year's noviciate.

But she never became a novice. She had at once wanted to keep the full rule, without any of the gradual assumption of its obligations usual among postulants; she had, for one thing, almost refused to write letters, whereas even the professed nuns wrote them with moderate frequency—except at certain seasons, such as Lent and Advent, when they were written only when necessity or charity demanded it.

The Prioress mildly insisted that the postulant should write occasionally, at least, to her father, her aunt, and her brother; but Jacqueline would only write under express obedience, and made her letters as brief as possible. Had the Prioress read them, she would have perceived that she was only being obeyed according to the letter, and not according to the kindly spirit of her injunction. But it was not the custom for her to read letters either addressed to the nuns or sent by them.

She also forbade Jacqueline to undertake any

austerity prescribed by the Rule for the professed nuns till definitely authorized to do so; and the postulant obeyed, but not willingly.

"The Holy Rule," said the gentle little Prioress, "is to help us to the life of prayer; it will be enough, dear child, if you spend these months in trying to learn the meaning and practice of contemplation."

But Jacqueline thought she knew about contemplative prayer already. Before her Retreat, and during it, she had experienced an almost sudden facility in mental prayer. It became a strange and wonderful pleasure. In a moment, almost, she could find herself abstracted from outward things, so that the invisible world grew more real, almost more tangible, than the monotonous 'realities' of life. She thought that the underlying truths of religion were, as it were, revealed to her by a tearing away of the tedious trappings in which they are commonly wrapped. Without treading slow and devious paths, she had suddenly arrived face to face with God. He called to her to come, and showed Himself, without any guide to bring her near—and she could understand His speech without any interpreter. It was a wonderful and thrilling thing to become instantly possessed of so high an experience without the long apprenticeship of earning it.

Her gift of prayer, while it lasted, was so manifest that the nuns could not but perceive it, as clear-

ly as other observers may note a plain fact in a different region. They were aware of it without curious watching, and they saw it with great reverence, many of them feeling sure that God was calling her to a singular and special union with Himself, perhaps to the rarest heights of sanctity. By these her vocation was almost taken for granted. But, then, they had not the same personal intercourse with her as the Prioress and the Mother Mistress of the Postulants, as another nun was called. These two Sisters were not so sure: from the first they doubted, and their doubts only grew as the weeks went by. Poverty, chastity, and obedience are the three special obligations of all 'religious,' and Jacqueline had been ready to strip herself of every earthly possession: no one could look in her face and doubt the absolute whiteness of her purity; but the touchstone of a monk's or a nun's life is obedience, and there the girl failed. Had the Prioress ordered her never to eat meat at all, nor eggs, nor milk, nor fish, she would have obeyed with loyal ardour. But the Prioress said:

"My dear, you've been eating meat all your life; your poor stomach has to be acclimatized: it can't learn new ways in five minutes. Give it time. A little meat in the middle of the day is a courtesy you owe to it just at first. Then, perhaps, every other day, then twice a week, and so on. And so with eggs and the other things."

If the Prioress had bidden her rise in the middle of the night to go to choir with the other nuns for the long, sung office of Matins and Lauds, that lasted from twelve to two o'clock Jacqueline would have been delighted. But the Prioress said:

"No, dear child. You get up very early here, and by eight o'clock at night you are tired out, after fifteen hours of learning new things. Your mind is all on the stretch. Go to bed at eight and stay there, please. Presently we'll let you get up once a week for Matins, and then oftener. Habits must be learned: a habit doesn't come like a good little dog because you whistle to it."

Jacqueline, with reluctance, obeyed as to not getting up in the night, but she stayed in the chapel till after eleven o'clock.

"My dear child," the Prioress expostulated, "you must be in bed by eight. We all are."

"But that's because you have to be up again before midnight, and I have not."

"Not entirely. It's because the Holy Rule orders us to be in bed at eight."

"But, Mother, I am not used to going to bed at eight; at home I never went till nearly twelve."

"Yes, dear child; and if you stay here, you will have to get used to going at eight: that's why you have to try and learn. It is quite as difficult to learn as going without meat."

"Much more difficult."

"Some find it so. We all have to learn. At home you sat up late; did you get up at five? What time was Mass?"

"At half-past eight."

"And you had been up since five!"

Jacqueline laughed.

"Oh no! I generally arrived at about quarter to nine, and sometimes not at all."

"Not at all! Weren't they anxious?"

"I mean not till breakfast was half over."

"Oh, I understand. You 'slept it out,' as the portress says. Well, you evidently require many hours' sleep, and, as you rise at five here, eight is not too early for you to go to bed."

"Nine hours for a fool!" laughed Jacqueline.

"For a postulant," corrected the Prioress mildly, laughing too. "My dear, it's all a matter of training and obedience. I hated going to bed at eight when I came here first; I couldn't sleep, and I wanted to pray."

"Isn't prayer better than sleep?"

"That depends. If God says 'Sleep' He doesn't mean 'speak,' even to Himself. It's all a matter of obedience. When the King tells a servant to go and do something, however trumpery the thing may be, he isn't obeyed when the servant stops in front of him talking—even in the most beautiful language."

"When you came first, and couldn't sleep, and wanted to pray, what did you do?"

"I tried to go to sleep. And the only prayer I attempted was 'Please shut my mouth and my eyes.' "

"But you told me the whole meaning of our life here was learning to pray. A means to an end. If God shortens the way to the end, why should we dictate the means to Him?"

"Dear child! we cannot. Nor is our little way the only way. There are many others. He may call you by some other way—higher than this, shorter, and more direct, as it would seem to you. If that is so, and I cannot tell, then it is plain that by this way of ours you are not to go. But if this little quiet, humble path is the way for anyone, then it is plain that so long as that person is in it she is to follow it, and not stroll aside."

"Does not that seem narrow?"

"Not to us. The road He Himself called broad does not lead whither we are trying to go. But, dear, dear child! if to you this way of ours seems narrow, and constrained, and pitiful, petty and smothering, do not try to walk in it. It would only choke you, and hold you back. How few we are! How many are they who are bravely walking and climbing upwards by countless tracks unlike this old one here! Our lowly path is not the only one to Heaven's gate, and only a handful find it their

best. It may be the worst for you—impossible for you.”

“Can I not do what you all do?”

“Much more, perhaps: very different things, and far more difficult: greater things, and beyond our imagining. But that would only mean that to stay here would be to deform and stunt your soul. I cannot tell if you should remain here. God will show you—if you let Him.”

“I pray.”

“What is prayer? Our prayer—the prayer of contemplative religious?”

“Speaking to Him—without words.”

“Ah, more! Listening while He speaks.”

“Is going to sleep listening?”

“Yes, when He says ‘Sleep.’ Obedience is listening.”

“But, Mother! to sleep at eight o’clock is no part of the Divine law; it is only your law here.”

“Yes, dear child. And that law of ours binds none who do not find here their home and calling. The laws of a family bind the members of it, if they be not contrary to God’s eternal law. Perhaps you are not meant to be one of this family—if you are not, these little laws of ours are not for you.”

“And, then, neither am I for you,” said Jacqueline, half resentfully.

“Exactly. You may be for some other family

altogether. Perhaps for your own natural family. Or it may be that you are destined to found a religious family of your own—some new order; but all who have done so, if, before, they were members of some existing order, were most obedient members of it. I am sure, dear child, that you do not even in your heart accuse me of trying to impose my own arbitrary will upon you in all this. None of our rules were made by me, as you know, and I cannot suppress or add to them. You would not think me doing my duty if I were to tell the professed Sisters that they might fast or not, come to choir or not, keep the hours of silence or not, exactly as each one pleased; but the same Rule which binds them to certain things lays down that the postulant is not to attempt them except very gradually, and that only as they are authorized."

The Prioress was thoroughly patient and most gentle; all the same, Jacqueline had a sort of half-resentful feeling, as if, when she wanted to fly upwards, weights were being tied to her feet.

CHAPTER XII

THE Mother of the Postulants was as gentle and patient as the Prioress, but she, who had years of experience, could not believe that the girl would ever be a nun in that order or any other.

"Supposing," Jacqueline asked her one day,

"that I had no vocation to this order—would you say that I might have one to some other order?"

"I would rather, in such a case, say nothing about it," the little nun answered, "because"—and here she laughed good-humouredly at herself—"I am like a man of one book, an ignorant old person who knows only her own book. If, so far as I could see, you had no vocation to this order that I know, I could not presume to have any opinion as to your fitness for other orders of which I know only the names and the bindings, so to speak."

"But I might have that fitness."

"Certainly; you might even be convinced that you had, but I should be quite ignorant on the subject. You might have a vocation to be a Sister of Charity, or a Little Sister of the Poor."

"But the contemplative life is higher."

"I don't see much use in those comparisons; no doubt the life of a priest is 'higher' than that of a baker, but there must be a good many people with the baker-vocation or we should have no bread."

"We might make our own bread."

Sister Placida laughed cheerfully.

"You wouldn't like that at all," she declared; "you would think it a great waste of time, and want to be in chapel."

Jacqueline detected a personal allusion, and retorted to it.

"You say that because I do not see much good

in sweeping corridors or washing a few plates," she said. "It does not humiliate me, it simply bores me."

"Nuns are never bored," laughed Sister Placida, "we leave that to fine ladies. But the little acts of manual labour are not meant to humiliate us, only to remind us of humility."

"They don't teach me to be humble."

"That may be your own fault, dear child. One person can produce great results from the same things that another can get nothing out of. Shakespeare used the same letters as Sir Martin Tupper, but he made words out of them that will teach mankind for ever, while Sir Martin Tupper's words only bored a single generation."

"I thought nuns were never bored?"

"You had me there, my dear! But, to tell the truth, Sir Martin cannot bore me now. I relinquished him among the pleasures of the world."

And the little nun laughed again.

"But, Mother Mistress, you spoke of Shakespeare's words and Tupper's words: the difference wasn't in their words, was it? but in Shakespeare's ideas and in Sir Martin's."

"Yes, you are quite right. The words were only their tools, and Shakespeare had something to make, and knew how. These little acts of manual labour are put in our hands as tools, and, indifferent as they are in themselves, we may make some-

thing with them, if we have it in us and will learn how. They are certainly not meant to humiliate us, but we are meant to dignify *them*: and, while we do them, we may remember how many there are who must be always doing them, and so come to a friendlier sympathy with them."

"I can sympathize with a housemaid or a scullerymaid without doing her work."

"Can you, dear? But some of us lack imagination, and cannot so readily feel for others till we have put ourselves in their place. To us, who are like that, these little things are a help. That is, I suppose, one reason for our short spells of lowly manual work, but there is, at all events, one other reason: the works are humble but easy, and I dare say they are meant to occupy our hands, harmlessly, usefully (so far as they go), and in lowly fashion, while our minds rest a little. It is a sort of variety."

Jacqueline made a little face, and Sister Placida did not mind, but laughed quite comfortably.

"You would prefer any monotony?" she said.

"I do not find any monotony in contemplation," Jacqueline answered.

To this the Mistress of the Postulants attempted no immediate reply, and her quiet face became a little graver.

"Do you think I was making a boast?" asked Jacqueline, with a quick blush.

"No, my dear, no. You spoke out what you felt.

But, my dear child, that gift of prayer that you feel now—it is not an absolute gift, it is rather a sort of loan, and it may not be left you as a permanent part of yourself, it will some day seem to fail, to dry up at its springs; and, if you have thought of it as a thing of your own, you will be utterly disconcerted, and then all this life of contemplation will look to you like an arid, empty desert, with neither God nor man in it. You will be desolate, and intolerably lonely.”

To Jacqueline this seemed, only too soon, to have been a chill, almost malign prophecy.

One morning she awoke, when roused by the Sister tapping at the door of her cell and saying “*Benedicamus Domino*,” but though she answered “*Deo gratias!*” she did not feel grateful. She lay still, awake, but almost unconscious, instead of instantly leaving her bed; and the only consciousness she had was of a listlessness that amounted to mental and physical torpor.

The night before, she had stayed in the chapel till after nine o’clock, quite rapt in a contemplation that was hardly distinguishable from some rare and exquisite sensible delight. She was fully conscious of that blissful exultation; and then the Prioress came and softly touched her, saying:

“My dear child, you must go to bed; I have been loath to interrupt you, but the Rule binds us both, and though I have waited more than an hour, fear-

ing to disturb you, I doubt if I did right. Now go, dear, and God will go with you."

Jacqueline obeyed, but with an aggrieved sense, and hardly obeyed the spirit of the direction she had received. She went to her cell, but sat up in her bed, making no attempt to sleep. The little room seemed full of voices, and they were very sweet. She did not know when they merged into sleep, for, sleeping, she heard them still in her dreams, and she could not tell when the deeper, heavier sleep, dreamless and weary, silenced them at last.

She had now no headache or feeling of illness, nor was she sleepy; but she felt utterly lazy, and to rise at once, wash, and dress, was a tedious labour, heavier and more disagreeable than it had ever been at home. At home she had often risen early and gone for a long walk, but much oftener she had lain in bed till the breakfast-gong sounded.

To-day she lay still, for an hour, not asleep, nor even thinking, but torpid.

When she did get up, she went through the prescribed external acts of reverence and devotion, and told herself candidly that they bored her. She found nothing behind them to-day. Till now they had brought so great a flood of meaning with them that she had been tempted to let them take more time than could be given. Her cell seemed empty, chill and frowzy. There was no one in it but herself, no Divine Presence, and of herself she was

conscious only as of a lump of inert flesh; for the first time it seemed as if her body was too big for the cell, out of drawing with it. There was nothing of her but her body; and the worst of it was that she knew she was not in the least unwell. She was not tired, nor bilious, nor teased by any ache in any part of her frame. But it was *all* frame, a heavy, stupid bulk framing no picture, still less enclosing any mirror—for weeks and months even, she had been able to see God reflected in her soul, as the sky is in the least pool. She could hardly believe she had a soul; and as for her body, it was an irrelevant appendage—to nothing: not even a hungry appendage. She was not hungry, nor thirsty, nor fatigued, nor in pain; to be any of these would have been a sign of life, a witness to some reality of existence in herself. All there was was a ponderous bulk of flesh that knocked itself blunderingly against things that were not in its way. She was slim enough, but she bumped against the doorpost as she went out of her cell as if there had not been room for her to pass.

CHAPTER XIII

HITHERTO she had liked the austere bareness of the corridor and staircase, carpetless, and void of any furniture or ornament—without so much as the picture of a saint hanging on the walls. It had

seemed to her exactly what was best and most fitting; the complete absence of detail, of anything not rigidly necessary, was precisely right, restful and helpful for the purpose of the place. Anything different would have been a distraction from the simplicity essential to contemplation. To-day the empty passage and stair seemed merely grim, gaunt, and hard, and the echo of her own footsteps sounded noisy and blatant—as a postulant she wore ordinary shoes and stockings, the nuns had only straw sandals on their bare feet.

In the cloister downstairs her boots made less noise on the stone pavement, and on the walls hung the Stations of the Cross, carved in stone; but she only glanced at them critically as she passed, and noticed for the first time that they were inartistic. She had often knelt for a long time before them, scarcely seeing *them*, but vividly realizing the scenes they were meant to recall.

It was nearly seven o'clock when she entered the chapel, and the community had been there almost two hours. She told herself at once that it was both cold and stuffy.

Meditation was finished, and the community prayers; they were singing Prime, and in a few minutes Mass would begin. During Lent no organ accompanied the nuns' voices, and Jacqueline noted how thin and meagre they sounded.

She passed into her own place, next to a little

novice whom she had liked—a quiet, simple creature, much less clever, perhaps, than herself, with a face that was more than pretty, almost beautiful in its gentle sweetness and purity.

“She looks like a smug pussy,” Jacqueline said to herself, when the girl looked up with a little smile as she drew back to let her pass. “Why does she grin like a Cheshire cat?”

The nuns’ choir faced the large grille, behind which was the sanctuary of the outer chapel, and Jacqueline remarked, with a sort of irritation, as the priest entered from the sacristy and went up to the altar, that his vestment was crooked; also that he pointed his joined hands downwards at the beginning of the Mass, instead of upwards.

“Devil-wards,” she said to herself, with a kind of sour alertness to anything amiss. Till that moment she had hardly considered him, personally, at all; he had been scarcely visible to her, because of the greatness of that which he represented. Whether old or young, uncouth or dignified, she had never noticed. The mere quality of his voice, its inflexions or tones, had been of as little consequence as the sort of type in which an august scripture may be printed is to an absorbed reader.

Now she watched him, criticizing every gesture, and almost disliking him for little peculiarities of pronunciation or emphasis. When he turned to say “*Dominus vobiscum*,” she perceived that he ‘flapped

his shoulders' and held his head on one side at a foolish angle, and that he did not always immediately find his place again in the Missal on turning back to it. He had near-sighted, peering eyes, 'and smells for the place in the book like a truffle-dog.'

When the server rang the bell at the *Sanctus*, she jumped in her place, not because it reminded her of her distraction and irreverence, but because the sound seemed so sharp, vibrant, and discordant.

She did not even try to pray, and when the Mass was ended she at once left the chapel, glad to get away. Everyone else had been to Holy Communion, and she was glad to think they would all remain behind. According to custom, she should have gone to her cell, arranged it, and made her bed. But she went into the garden.

She had always liked the place, and had passed many happy hours pacing its alleys alone.

"It is needlessly ugly," she told herself to-day. "How mamma would find fault with it! Don't *any* of them care for gardening?"

As a matter of fact, several did care for it, and all took their share of work in it; but in a particularly cold March there were not likely to be many flowers.

"What idiots those birds must be," she thought, "to stop here, when they can fly where they choose!"

She made up her mind at once that she would not

stay there herself. She had consulted no one about coming, and she would consult no one about going. Without waiting to experience it, she pictured to herself what the day's process there would be, and decided that she could not stand it even for one other day. She was resolved never to enter the chapel again, and she would like to go without speaking again to anyone in the convent. To do that literally might be impossible, but she would be gone with as little leave-taking as could be managed.

For months, yesterday even, she had thought of this place as the only bit of God's world that had any meaning for her; now it had no meaning, and she shut her recollection against it harshly. The nuns had often spoken to her of the great work of God's Church outside; of the glorious charity of such of His humble servants as the Little Sisters of the Poor, or the Poor Sisters of Nazareth; of Missions in heathen lands; and of all the myriad energies of Catholic Christianity. With a wistful and wide tenderness, too, they had talked of the great philanthropy of many non-Catholics, and of many non-believers, gently commending them to her prayers. This had almost vexed her, for she had wanted to shut herself in, and shut outside of herself all that was not Contemplative Religion. That—for they had instinctively perceived this attitude of her mind—was one of the reasons why the

Prioress and the Mistress of Postulants had never believed she would be a Contemplative Nun herself. They knew well how wide is the spirit of true Contemplative Religion, and how universal the scope of its charity.

But now the world outside that convent and its narrow precincts seemed to Jacqueline the only world with any real existence. She had all but told herself that she had been rapt in a five months' vision, and now those five months were shrunk to a stale and shrivelled delusion—a nightmare from which she was doggedly determined to awake.

She did not in the least guess how her wilfulness, her wayward self-reliance, had wounded the real sweetness of her own natural disposition. Not yet did she accuse herself of selfish indifference to her aunt or her father in coming here, as she had come, with self-absorbed haste, without counsel, and almost without farewell. Nor did she yet accuse herself of a new selfishness in determining to be gone, without advice, and with no gentle forbearance, with no tenderness of leave-taking.

CHAPTER XIV

A LAY-SISTER came out into the garden to shake a dirty mat, and Jacqueline called out to her from some distance to come to her.

It was still the time of silence, and the girl's loud

summons had almost a scandalous sound; but the lay-Sister put down her mat and came at once. She smiled as she trotted up, but she did not speak—for the community silence should not be broken till after "chapter."

"You can go outside?" Jacqueline asked, or asserted. "I want you to go and tell a cab to come here for me at half-past eight."

The lay-Sister could 'go outside,' but not without commission from the Prioress, and she looked, and felt, aghast. Fetch a cab! Fetch a cab for this postulant, who was to be 'clothed' in four weeks—a postulant who had, it was admiringly whispered, begged and prayed that her 'clothing' might be hastened, and her postulancy curtailed.

"Can't you understand?" asked Jacqueline irritably.

The lay-Sister nodded, not irritably, but with wide-eyed wonder.

"Well, go and do it." The girl's tone was imperious, and Sister Martha had never received an imperious order there. But she did not put on a resentful air: she did, however, shake her head, not doubtfully.

"You'd better go and finish shaking your mat," said Jacqueline: and Sister Martha was quite of that opinion, and went off to do it. Whatever dust there might be in the postulant's head it did not concern the lay-Sister to beat it out, but the dust in

the mat was her concern. As she went, however, she asked St. Anthony of Padua that if the postulant had mislaid any portion of her senses, he would be good enough to find them for her. "If I lose a duster even," she thought, "he finds it for me: he's that good-natured. If *I* was in heaven I doubt I'd be thinking folks should look after their own dusters." And a postulant's wits were obviously a more important matter.

"Her back," thought Jacqueline, watching her go, "is like a box in a bag."

Fortunately, the Prioress came out to look for her. She knew well that something was amiss, but could not guess that the girl had, at the first cold breath of difficulty, or discouragement, simply decided to go. Jacqueline had repeatedly urged her request to be 'clothed' without waiting for the six months of her postulancy to be up, and had never taken in good part the Prioress's mild but firm reply that to curtail the period allotted by the rule was not in her power.

"The Pope could curtail it," the girl would say. Which the Prioress could not deny, but her quiet smile showed very plainly that she certainly would not ask him.

Now she came through the garden to Jacqueline, and smiled as she drew near; but her smile, though sweet and kindly, was not merry, for she guessed that there was some trouble.

"Are you feeling unwell, dear child?" she asked in a low, very gentle voice as they met. She also was bound by 'the silence,' but it was only a rule of custom that must always yield to necessity or charity.

"No. I was only lazy—that was why I came so late to chapel."

"You are not often lazy. Is anything the matter?"

"Yes. Mother Prioress, I want to go: if you will let me go without discussion I shall be glad; but with it, or without it, I must go."

"My dear! This isn't a prison, and I am not a jailor: of course you shall go if you are sure you wish it." And the little nun, speaking as gently as ever, and without the least irritation, could not help a certain rather pretty and very innocent accession of dignity.

"I am quite sure. I asked Sister Martha to go and order a cab to come for me at half-past eight, but she would only shake her head."

"I don't think," said the Prioress, smiling again, "that you can blame her. She could not go out, for any purpose, without asking leave. But do you really mean that you want to leave us like that—in half an hour? Of course you shall do so if you say that it is to be so, but I think afterwards you might be sorry."

"No. I can't bear another day here: and I can't bear saying good-bye to anyone."

"And you will not tell me a word of your reasons? Dear Jacqueline, I can see that you are suffering, but will you not suffer more, later on, if you act so"—(she almost said 'roughly,' but changed her word and said)—"hastily?"

"Mother Prioress, I am not suffering. I feel nothing at all—except a desire to be gone: and . . . an aversion to this place."

"Then, dear child, it shall be as you say. I know you have little packing to do, but it shall be done for you while you have breakfast: and the extern porter shall go for the cab—it will be here by the time you have eaten. I do not know about the trains——"

"That does not matter: I will wait at the station till there is one, and I will send a telegram from there to tell them at home that I am coming."

"I hate letting you travel like that—you have never made a journey without a maid in your life, I expect."

"I had no maid when I came here."

"But your father and your aunt brought you."

Jacqueline made a little gesture of impatience and said: "I can travel perfectly well alone. It is I who have always looked after my maid, not she after me."

The Prioress had entirely ceased to think of Jac-

queline as a member of her community—the girl's manner had brought about the change in a few moments—and she now only thought of her as a young lady of rank who should not travel unattended; but she made no further objection, and they walked side by side towards the house. A little tender gleam of sunshine was touching it, and in her heart the silent nun was praying that light and tenderness might touch the wayward child's heart too. But Jacqueline was not thinking of her—was hardly thinking of anything.

"I didn't know I was hungry," she said abruptly. "I find I am. Can I have a mutton-chop for breakfast?"

It was Lent, and it was Friday—the Prioress wondered if the girl remembered.

"When one is travelling," Jacqueline observed coolly, "one need not abstain."

The little nun was almost puzzled as to her duty: she had others to think of besides the girl who was thus abruptly leaving them: and she could well imagine how the Irish lay-Sister, who was the Community cook, would be scandalized at receiving an order to cook meat for breakfast on a Friday, Lent or no Lent. She pondered a moment and said:

"If there is a chop you shall have it—but I really don't know." To herself she said: "I must make it right with Sister Patrick's conscience."

To her, in spite of Jacqueline's denial, it seemed plain that the ex-postulant *was* ill, if not in her body, somewhere.

"You will be travelling when you are at the station, I suppose," she said, with a little smile. "If there is no chop, and there is no train at once, you can have a second breakfast there. To send out for meat would only keep you waiting."

"Yes, I would rather not wait."

They had reached the Convent then, and the Prioress said:

"I will take you to the room where our chaplain has his breakfast: he has gone by now, and there is a fire there. Your breakfast shall be taken to you there."

Jacqueline was glad, because she did not want to go to the Refectory where the nuns might still be.

"This is it," said the Prioress, opening a door; "this half is in the enclosure."

Across the room ran a sort of counter, surmounted by a light *grille* of wood, like a trellis, and through it Jacqueline could see a table covered with a white cloth. In the nuns' refectory there was no tablecloth on the tressle-table, and there were no plates, china or glass, but only wooden trenchers, pewter mugs, spoons and forks. At one end of the part of this room that was in the 'enclosure' was a door, leading into the entrance hall.

"It has no lock," the Prioress explained with a

quiet smile; "you can pass through. We are only bolted in by our own good-will."

Jacqueline turned to the door at once.

"Will you not say 'good-bye' even to me, my dear, dear child?" asked the nun, not reproachfully, but with a regret she could not hide.

"It is an ugly word, Mother."

"Is it? 'God be with you,' isn't that what it means?"

She held her arms open, and drew the child into them; but Jacqueline, though she would not repulse her, only yielded to her loving embrace without real response.

"He will be with you: He is with us all—if we will be with *Him*," whispered the little nun.

They were very simple words, very softly spoken: but they only smote the surface of the girl's ear. And she could not pretend anything.

"Mother," she said, with a dry coldness, "you talk your language. And yesterday I understood it. To-day I have forgotten it all."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!"

"It is so. I must go. I cannot stay and mouth a talk that I don't mean——"

"No, dear, no! And yet, to let you go like this! I may be doing utterly wrong to let you go——"

"You cannot help it. And, Mother, you have not sent for my cab, or told them about packing my things—I don't want to go up into that cell again.

It is stuffed with emptiness. Never mind the chop—just let them send some tea and bread and butter.”

She had released herself from the nun’s embrace and was moving again to the door into the hall.

“Good-bye, dear child, dear, dear Jacqueline;” it was said quite in a whisper, but the irrepressible human tenderness of the woman struck a chord that answered, and the girl turned.

“‘Dear’?” she echoed.

Her tone was not gracious, it was more than half sceptical: but it was wistful.

“I,” she said—“I, Jacqueline, was never dear to you.”

“No? Were you not?”

And all the loudest protestations of love ever made could not have conveyed a tenderer, more reproachful protest.

It was the supernatural the sick-hearted child was out of conceit with: the natural heart in her was not dead, but numbed. Half her blindness suffered a sudden piercing stab of light, and in the little quiet nun, plain enough of face, she saw something she had never cared to look for before. Hitherto she had only thought of her as ‘the Prioress.’ Now she was half-troubled, half-ashamed, to see in her a gentle woman of whose personal affection she had never taken the least account.

"What was your name in the world?" Jacqueline asked abruptly.

But the nun only smiled and shook her head. The sisters left all earthly titles behind them.

"Ah, but I know. You were Lady Genesta de Braose."

"They only called me 'Goosey.' I was born on St. Michael's Day. A Michaelmas goose! And I was silly enough."

"You were silly if you ever cared for me," said Jacqueline.

And for that little speech, with the queer crooked smile that went with it, the Prioress in her heart thanked God.

"Ah! well!" she said.

"Good-bye." And Jacqueline bent down, and kissed the plain, patient face. "Good-bye—Goosey! Do you mind?"

Certainly the Prioress had never expected to be called by that name again; but she did not mind.

As Jacqueline opened the door into the hall and passed through it, the little nun watched her go, with shining eyes, and a heart full of loving tears. She had never had to see a postulant, or a novice either, go from her before. They had all stayed.

That this postulant would not stay she had long been almost sure; but the manner of her going was not, as she thought, right. Of how it might reflect on herself, and her Community, she was not think-

ing at all. That she and her nuns might be held to have been guilty of some fault or failure, which had driven the girl to her abrupt departure—that was a thought that might have occurred to many in the Prioress's place, but it did not occur to her.

She stood still for a few moments, with regretful eyes fastened on the door through which Jacqueline had disappeared: then she heard the lock of the other door, from the hall into the outer portion of the room, turn, and did not wait for the girl's reappearance, but went away to do as she had been asked.

CHAPTER XV

IN the train, on the journey homewards, Jacqueline tried to read, having bought a pile of papers and reviews at the station. But she could only look at the pictures in the magazines, and even they conveyed nothing tangible to her mind. There was one old lady in the carriage with her, rather dry-looking and wizened, but evidently of Jacqueline's own class. She read the *Morning Post*, and slightly shook her head, more than once, as if condemning some Radical iniquity: of her fellow-traveller she took no notice.

Jacqueline at last gave up looking at pictures and stared out of the window: a rather bleak morning had improved, and the March sun was shining on the fields. The girl was not thinking of them, or

of anything she saw outside. Her heart (it was not conscience yet) was accusing her of harshness to the little Prioress; and it annoyed her to become aware that for five months she had lived in close relations with a woman, whom she now recognized as very lovable, without loving her. It was a stupidity, and Jacqueline did not like to know she had been stupid: by nature, too, she was generous, fonder of giving than receiving, and she saw that she had been given a deep and quiet love, making worse than no return.

Of the other nuns, or of the Convent life, she was not yet ready to think at all: she told herself, with shallow petulance, that she had literally wasted five months of her life, that was all. Why those months should be counted as a greater waste than the rest of her life, before them, she did not pause to inquire. That they might have taught her something she was not yet willing to perceive. She determined to cancel them altogether now—as though she should tear five months out of the journal of her life: and she was prepared to resist any demand from others (and by others she meant, probably, her brother), to give any account or explanation of them, or of the ending of them. Such demand she would resent as an unfriendly act.

At the junction she went to the bookstall, bought a sheet of paper and an envelope, and wrote a little note in pencil to the Prioress—brief enough, but

kindly and loving. It was hurried, and almost incoherent, but a genuine little outburst of compunction, warm-hearted and human. She felt lightened by the writing of it, and was more cheerful when she found herself again in the train—not the one she had left just now; but the old lady was again her fellow-traveller.

“I wonder,” thought Jacqueline, “if anybody is fond of her. She is evidently a widow, I wonder if he was ever in love with her.”

On the whole she did not think it probable, and, to make up for it, when their eyes happened to meet, Jacqueline smiled, and her smile could be very sweet.

“I thought she looked an ill-natured girl,” thought the old lady. “One should not judge by first impressions—perhaps she suffers from indigestion: in the early morning it causes an oppression.”

The old lady had been a little embarrassed when Jacqueline had again got into the same carriage with her at the junction: for on leaving the other train the girl had left all her papers behind her—several shillings’ worth, including a quarterly review.

“Are you forgetting your literature?” she had asked—the old lady (who was wealthy) disliked extravagance.

“Oh no, thank you. I’ve done with them.”

And Jacqueline had hurried off to buy her paper and envelope.

Then, regarding them as derelict, the old lady had gathered up the *Graphic*, *Illustrated London News*, *Saturday Review*, *Spectator*, and *Edinburgh Review*—and they were under her rug now, and she wanted to put the rug round her old legs.

When Jacqueline caught her eye and smiled, the old lady smiled too, and the girl began to question her hasty decision that “he” could never have been in love with her. It is wonderful what effects a patch of light can bring out of plain and unpromising things—Jacqueline had learned that from her mother’s water-colours. She smiled again and remarked that it was still cold, in spite of the bright sunshine.

“Yes, and draughty. Don’t you find this carriage draughty?”

The old lady was thinking of her rug and of her legs: as also of Jacqueline’s late possessions.

“Shall I tuck you up?” the girl suggested, and she immediately got up to do it. She liked old people—not caring much for the middle-aged—and she had naturally pretty manners to them.

The old lady was really taken aback. Her ill-natured girl was almost officiously good-natured, and there were all those papers!

She laid a hand, instinctively, on her rug, but Jacqueline did not understand, and thought it was

only a preliminary motion of assistance in the tucking up process. Her own actions were always prompt and effectual, and in two or three seconds she had wrapped those old legs warmly up.

The reviews and papers stood confessed, but Jacqueline was not looking at them.

"My dear," said the old lady, positively blushing, "I—stole them!"

Jacqueline laughed, and her young laughter was very pleasant (if only the poor Prioress could have heard it!). She was delightedly amused, and that amusement did a good deal to complete the re-humanizing of her.

The old lady laughed too, and her blush and her laugh so changed her dry old face that Jacqueline instantly decided that she had been a very attractive old lady—when she was young.

"My dear, I'm an economical person," the old lady confessed. "I hate waste. And you said you had done with them. Of course I dislike Whigs——"

"Why, 'of course?'" thought Jacqueline, with a glance at her fellow-traveller's curls.

"But there is good writing in the *Edinburgh*. And it costs six shillings: and railway porters couldn't appreciate it. I've a nephew who writes for the *Edinburgh* (my sister married out of our politics), and she wrote word that he had an article in this number—I knew she meant me to buy it.

But that I didn't do—one shouldn't *buy* the other people's publications: our money should go to encourage the right side: I hope you don't mind. Young people despise economy, but I like it."

"Of course I don't mind—but now I'm devoured with curiosity about your nephew's article. Have you looked for it?"

"Yes: in the waiting-room. I found it at once—though it is not signed. 'The Ballot and Purity of Elections' it's called. That's his great subject. Of course *we* never wanted the ballot, but his side did: and, now they've got it, Philibert says it's no good at all unless canvassing is done away with too. I have only glanced into the article, but I can see that that's what it is all about: the iniquity of canvassing is his *cheval-de-bois*."

"'Philibert,' " thought Jacqueline: then aloud, "Is your nephew in Parliament?"

"Oh yes, he sits for Rentchester——"

Jacqueline laughed and said:

"Haven't I heard of him, then! Mr. Philibert du Hamel! He unseated my father . . ."

"Dear, dear! That's very bad. I hope you won't bear *me* malice—remember I'm on your father's side in politics."

It was quite plain that Jacqueline bore no malice, and Mr. du Hamel's aunt began to enjoy herself very much.

"So Sir Jeremy Joscelyn is your father," she said.

"How odd that is! I knew your mother once, slightly. That is to say we stayed together in a country-house—she was about your present age then——"

"I am seventeen."

"And I should say she would be not more then."

"Was she like me?"

"No, my dear. I think not. A lovely young creature too, but not like you."

Jacqueline blushed: no one had ever before called her, by imputation, a lovely young creature.

"As I know your name, my dear," the old lady went on, "it's fair you should know mine. I am Mrs. Euston."

If she had said she was Mrs. Paddington, or Mrs. Waterloo, it would have conveyed quite as much to Jacqueline, who had never gone out in society. Any young lady of her class who had been through a London season would have known that there was only one Mrs. Euston, the mother of Lord St. Pancras.

The old lady perceived that Sir Jeremy Joscelyn's daughter had never heard of her, and felt less compunction about her nephew having unseated that gentleman. Then she remembered that the girl's mother was not right in her head, and made excuses: all the same she always gave it as her opinion, afterwards, that Lady Adelgitha's daughter was queer too. "She was travelling without

any maid, and with scarcely any luggage: only a scrubby-looking bag: and she dashed across the carriage to 'tuck me up' in an odd way. Flighty, no doubt."

Mrs. Euston's allusions to her mother set Jacqueline's mind on a new track. At the beginning of her journey she had been troubled by recollections of the unappreciated Prioress: now she suddenly awoke to the fact that during the five months at the Convent her mother had been, almost wilfully, forgotten. It stung her to think of it.

When, in the drawing-room at Boon Court, she went straight to her mother, and knelt by her, she was full of compunction—and she was not unmindful of her coldness to the Prioress: in the tenderness she offered to her mother she was making reparation to the Prioress as well. Her mother's indifference, and repulse of her affection, she took as a double punishment, for two sins she had committed against her own heart.

PART II

LORD HELMSTONE AND COUNT SELVAGGIO

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Lady Berengaria de Bohun drove over to thank Lady Louisa Raffham for her kindness to Jacqueline, she took the girl with her, as she had promised. On arrival they were informed that her ladyship was at home and shown into the drawing-room, a large room facing northwards, pleasant enough perhaps on a hot summer afternoon, but rather gloomy now, with a cold north-east wind outside, and no sun anywhere. There was, however, a good fire, and, on the grey marble chimney-piece over it, stood a lean skeleton clock that made no secret of its meagre insides, with candelabra on each side, to match it, also made of gilt and silver—little Godiva-dressed boys of silver holding up three gilt torches apiece. An immense mirror, reaching up to the ceiling, reflected the backs of the little silver boys, and all of the clock's insides that could not be seen from in front. A needle-work carpet covered most of the floor, and had once been

intended to cheat the spectator into the idea that he was walking upon flowers: now that it was greatly faded it was not particularly ugly. There were five tall *consoles*, with grey marble tops, like narrow-chested chimney-pieces, with eight feet of mirror behind each of them—three between windows, and one at each end of the room. And there were three big tables, in a row, down the middle of the room, all round, but the largest, in the centre, was of inlaid wood and the tops of the other two were of inlaid marbles, lapis lazuli, and malachite. There was not a book anywhere, nor a flower; and on the walls there were only two pictures, one of a Dutch wedding and the other of a Dutch funeral.

"Isn't this room appalling?" asked Lady Louisa, when she appeared, and had greeted her guests. "It looks as if it had the tooth-ache. So does that statue of my husband's father. *He* deserved it for having his statue done at all. A statue in trousers!"

Lady Berengaria had been agreeably surprised by the room: it struck her as inoffensive. She did not care much for statues, and was glad there were none at Boon Court, but she thought statues in general would do just as well in trousers. Certainly the late Helbore Raffham, Esq., M.F.H., appeared to have been an ugly man: but she did not think it mattered. She hoped that where he had gone nothing worse than his looks had been urged against him.

"It is a fine room," she remarked civilly, "forty-five feet by thirty, I dare say. I never can guess dimensions."

"When one is ugly one can't be too small," laughed Lady Louisa. "Nothing will warm it."

"It is convenient to have one room that will be cool in summer," suggested Lady Berengaria.

"It is all one can say for it, and one could say as much for an ice-house. I haven't had the courage to tackle this room yet . . ."

And she stood, with one hand on her hip, glancing critically about her: Lady Berengaria almost shuddered. She was not used to ladies who stood with arms akimbo, though the attitude did not annoy her in a cottager; and she pictured the room after Lady Louisa should have tackled it—china dogs here and there, warming-pans hung up, and a crop of framed photographs.

"I should not have invaded you so soon," she said, all the more courteously because of her undetected shudder—"indeed, I should not have known you had arrived yet—but for your kindness to Jacqueline yesterday——"

"Oh! it was Jacqueline who was kind to *me*; I had her to talk to, instead of swallowing my tea alone: and to pick up a young lady on the road was almost an adventure: an adventure is priceless at Wildspur, I should say."

Lady Berengaria abhorred adventures, especially

to young ladies on roads, but she smiled with conscientious amiability, though she saw no particular reason why her niece should be called so soon by her Christian name, and could not forget that adventures had not always been reported as uncommon at Wildspur Grange.

She tried to express her gratitude for Lady Louisa's good-nature to Jacqueline, but Lady Louisa interrupted her again.

"I am sure your teeth must be chattering in your head," she declared. "With a north wind this room is uninhabitable—I was trying to make something of another room, shall we go there?"

Of course her guests had to do as she suggested, though Lady Berengaria would have been rather better pleased to stay where they were: she shrank from the task of commending her hostess's improvements in that other room, and besides a change of quarters seemed to imply a longer visit.

"What can one do with him?" said Lady Louisa, jerking her head at her father-in-law's statue as they passed it on their way to the door. "I wonder if the parson would have him in the church: he's buried there, and it could do as a monument. He'd be out of the way there, and as he never went to church during his life it's all the more reason why he should go now."

"I should put him in that niche," said Jacque-

line as they passed out into the hall; "he'd just fit it."

"Yes, but I should see him every time I went upstairs. . . . This, Lady Berengaria, is the billiard-room, and I've been working at it all morning. Come and sit down."

At one end of the room there was a wide arch, beyond which, up two steps, was what had been another room, now arranged as what in hotels is called a lounge. All the lighting was from above, and there were no side-windows. Lady Louisa had certainly made the place comfortable, and pretty in a fashion: on the whole it was better than Lady Berengaria had expected, though there were, she thought, too many photographs, and they were all of men, and the chairs suggested laziness. She could not imagine anyone doing anything useful in them. Besides the photographs, there was one large portrait on an easel, done in water-colour, and representing a young man in a shooting-coat.

"I only unpacked him to-day," said Lady Louisa, "how do you like him?"

Her question was certainly addressed to Jacqueline, but the girl did not answer. Lady Berengaria adjusted her pince-nez, and prepared to comment.

"He is supposed to be as handsome as they make 'em," Lady Louisa declared. "It's my nephew, Helmstone."

"Ah!" said Lady Berengaria. "There is a likeness—isn't there, about the mouth?"

"Perhaps. His mouth is the worst thing in his face. He gets his good looks from his mother—*our* lot are none of us anything much to look at."

Jacqueline said nothing, but the portrait interested her, the face was the handsomest she had ever seen in a picture or out of one, and yet it was half-spoiled by an expression of discontent.

"He is a selfish man," she thought, "and not stupid, and he suffers for it. He only thinks of himself, and doesn't find himself worth thinking about."

She was partly right, as mere instinct often makes us; Lord Helmstone had never thought of anything but pleasing himself, and he had never been quite successful in pleasing himself.

"I should say," observed poor Lady Berengaria, who was little wont to be called upon for such criticisms, "that it is a very clever portrait, and that the artist found his subject worth his best efforts."

"The artist is a *she*—a hen-painter," said Lady Louisa. "He *is* good-looking, isn't he?" she added insistently, again glancing towards Jacqueline.

"Certainly it is the portrait of a handsome young man," said Lady Berengaria, almost blushing: probably it was the first time in her life she had been compelled to remark on a young man's good looks.

As they drove away they met Sir Jeremy and Frederick riding up to the house, and Lady Berengaria was glad they had not arrived ten minutes earlier, as it would not then have been easy to get away so soon.

"You don't like her?" said Jacqueline.

"I like her as much as I expected."

("As much as you intended," thought the girl.)

But aloud she said:

"She is not of your sort—I know that——"

"No, dear, she is not of our sort."

"She was not so nice to you and me together as she was yesterday to me alone. I saw that. I think she rather likes shocking people."

"She said nothing exactly shocking. But you are right if you think I do not much admire her way of talking."

"Aunt Berengaria, I hope you won't mind if I accept her invitation to ride over and see her. I think I do like her, though I quite understand that you never could."

This was grievous to Lady Berengaria, not solely because she disliked the idea of an intimacy between Jacqueline and Lady Louisa, but also because of the division of taste and opinion implied in the very form of the girl's request.

But she had no idea of being a tyrant, and said at once:

"No, dear: if you like to go you can, of course.

She is your father's sister-in-law, and Frederick's aunt, there is a natural connexion, and, as your father will certainly not object, there is no possible reason why I should."

"She's Frederick's aunt, but I don't think they'll like each other."

CHAPTER XVII

JACQUELINE availed herself of her aunt's permission, and went very often to Wildspur Grange.

"What does she go for?" demanded her mother.
"Who is this new woman?"

"Adelgitha, she is not new: only she has been away a number of years."

"And what has she come back for?"

"Well, it's her home. She is quite right, I think, to come back."

"But you wish she had stopped away. What does that girl go for? We've never known the people at Wildspur Grange."

"They were strangers. Lady Louisa is Frederick's aunt."

"*He* doesn't go there much, does he? And the other man—Sir Jeremy Bentham, does he?"

"Not Bentham, Addy; Joscelyn."

"Well, Joscelyn! What does it matter? Bentham or Joscelyn? I thought there was a Sir Jeremy Bentham. Jacqueline should do as you desire her. She is headstrong. Do you like her?"

"Addy, darling! I love her better than anybody in the world except you."

"Then she should do as you desire her. I never quite approved of her. She does what she likes."

Lady Louisa expressed as little appreciation of Frederick.

"My dear," she said to Jacqueline, "I don't admire my nephew at all."

"Your nephew is my brother."

"Oh, but I shall not say a word against your brother. But if I mayn't say what a prig I have for a nephew, there's no use in being an aunt. And he's bumptious. And he wants to boss *you*—I saw that very plainly. He thinks himself a diplomat, and he let me understand that I might reasonably hope to see as much as I chose of *him*, but that you were not my niece, and might—have other engagements."

"Sometimes," said Jacqueline, laughing, "diplomats have to do with difficult people who read into what is said meanings that were never intended."

"I understand Master Freddy very well: and I like you very well; so I shall say no more about my nephew, lest you should be cross on your brother's account. You're pretty brought up, though I wasn't, and I'm sure anybody might abuse my brother Hove to me and I not turn a hair."

"Do people tell you Lord Hove is a prig?"

"Lord, no! His little weaknesses were never of

that sort. We're not that way inclined. My nephew Joscelyn doesn't get it from his papa's first venture. But, before we leave him, let me warn you that he will boss you if he can. Perhaps you like it."

"I'm afraid I like my own way."

"And it's a better way than any he will try to teach you. What a pity *he's* not the girl! So much prunes and prism should be petticoated. Why don't your aunt like me?"

"Why do you try to prevent her liking you?"

"Because I can't help it."

"Then you needn't ask why she can't help not liking you."

"I don't mind much. The only person at Boon Court I want to like me does."

"Lady Louisa, yes. I do like you. But I love my aunt——"

"Yet you won't please her by sending me to Coventry."

There is no occasion to report fully all the conversations between Jacqueline and her new friend: what Lady Louisa said often jarred upon the girl, who found much of it in bad taste, and not least her frequent attempts to praise Jacqueline herself by implied contrast with other people. It was easy to see that Lady Louisa thought Lady Berengaria a stiff and starched old dowdy, and Sir Jeremy a goose, though she did not actually formulate either

judgment in speech. That she disliked Frederick she contrived to make very plain. Jacqueline knew all this was wrong, and thought it a blemish in her friend, but she liked her, and rapidly grew into the habit of riding over to Wildspur at least once in each week. The little intimacy Sir Jeremy had secretly intended to enjoy on his own account he soon saw had been forestalled by his daughter. To do him justice he did not grudge it to her, for it seemed to him that life at Boon Court was dull for a girl; but Frederick was irritated and tried to preach; to him, however, Jacqueline would barely listen.

"My dear Frederick," she said, "papa fully approves, and Aunt Berengaria makes no objection: I certainly shall not ask your leave."

CHAPTER XVIII

A FEW days after this Declaration of Independence it happened that Jacqueline was again at Wildspur.

"I thought you would never come," said Lady Louisa, "and I particularly wanted you. I have been bragging about you, and was impatient for you to come and confirm my report. Helmstone is here, and a friend of his. The friend doesn't matter: Helmstone's friends are often queer; but——"

Before she had time to say anything more the door opened and Lord Helmstone himself came in.

Jacqueline could only think of him in connexion with his portrait, which she had now seen very often, and it struck her at once how observantly the artist had reproduced him. He was a singularly handsome man, not yet thirty by several years, and his face was intelligent; his figure was manly, and the large grey eyes were honest; but, until he smiled, the expression of discontent suggested something like fretfulness, when he did smile, however, one would have said, "A sweet-tempered man by nature, the fretfulness is only an accidental growth."

As Lady Louisa introduced him to Jacqueline the smile appeared, and the girl noted its pleasantness, and also that he had manners of a higher quality than his aunt's. They were gentle, and quiet, and conveyed somehow the certainty that the young man thought very little of himself. Self-indulgent and idle, he was not vain or conceited.

He did not prove to be talkative, as Lady Louisa was, and what he said was never loud or assertive. To every woman he had an air of deference, as if apart altogether from youth, rank, or beauty, she must in quality of her womanhood be above himself. Yet his own mother had been a woman of damaged reputation whom even his father had been able to divorce.

"A nice man," thought Jacqueline, "but spoiled by idleness."

That he was idle was quite plain to her: he had never done anything useful, and never tried. Thus she decided, and her intuition was not a rash judgment.

"She doesn't approve of me," he thought. And he too was right. Jacqueline thought a man should do something definite.

When, half an hour later, the girl had gone away Lady Louisa stood opposite her nephew, with her hand upon her hip, and said:

"Well?"

Lord Helmstone laughed, looking down into the fire, and shook his head. He had a low, quiet laugh that was not peculiarly hilarious.

"You can't deny she is a lovely girl," said his aunt.

"Why should I want to?"

"Say she is, then."

"Certainly. She is beautiful."

"Very few women are that."

"She is not a woman. A large, wise, child."

"I'm not so sure about her wisdom. The people about her are *too* wise, and she won't be anything they are."

"I thought you said Sir Jeremy was an ass."

"So he is. But he don't count. Aunt Berengaria rules the roost."

"Where's Selvaggio all this time?"

"Never mind Selvaggio. I want you to talk about Jacqueline."

"What's the good? She doesn't approve of me."

"That's not the point—yet. Do you approve of *her*?"

Helmstone was still looking into the fire, and he did not at once reply. He did not really want to reply, or to talk of Miss Joscelyn, at all.

"Loody," he said at last (and not till a little exclamation of impatience from her had, as it were, insisted). "She is, as you said before I saw her, a girl of rare beauty and interest. But you need not think she will ever be interested in me."

"Why shouldn't she? You are quite wrong. She comes here incessantly, and, seeing you here, she can't help thinking about you——"

"The more she thinks the less will she approve of me."

"Approve! What stuff! She never sees a man, and where will she a handsomer one——"

Helmstone, when his aunt made this allusion to his good looks, made a movement of irritation, but she only shrugged her shoulders and went on:

"She can't ignore you. And circumstances are just so with her that she must be particularly ready to fall in love—if only to get away from Boon Court, and its fogeydom. She has just come home from a convent, and the fact that she wouldn't be

a nun to please them shows that she has a will of her own. You talk of approving—no doubt Lady Berengaria would disapprove of you, as she does of me, and Brother Fred too; but that would only make Jacqueline determined to see you with her own eyes."

"Her own eyes are what I'm afraid of. She doesn't care sixpence for—for the looks of a thing: she goes by what it's worth. And, I can see she doesn't think me worth anything."

"Highty-tighty! All in the doleful dumps about her! I believe you're in love already. I meant *her* to fall in love first."

"That was your little mistake, Loody. In love! Why are women always thinking of falling in love?"

"It's not what I often think of. Do you suppose I ever fell in love with Squire Raffham?"

Her nephew ventured on no hypothesis as to that: he was, in truth, still thinking of Jacqueline.

"Loody," he said quietly, "I wish you'd drop this idea. It won't come off. When you started it I thought (before I saw you and her together) it was only a bit of your talk: this afternoon I began to think you meant business . . ."

"So I do mean business. She will have pots of money, and I know you wouldn't look at her, if she were Cræsus's daughter, unless she was worth looking at: but she is. And she comes of good blood—

and perhaps we want a little. She'll be none the worse for that old dowdy's bringing up—personally, I can't do with Lady Berengaria; but she is a lady all down her long back, and a good woman if ever Goddlemighty (as poor Raffham used to call Him) made one. You'd be all the better for a wife of that sort——”

“Lady Berengaria's sort? Isn't she older than you?”

Lady Louisa laughed, but stuck to her guns.

“Only in wisdom. You may take my word for it that a girl who has lived all her life with her has learned the things a man's wife is none the worse for having learned. Lady Berengaria is as narrow and stiff as that poker, but trustworthy, and if Jacqueline isn't narrow she has good, honest traditions behind her. Oh, Helmstone, don't be pig-headed. What a lot we have been! What sort of a fish am I—and what sort was my mother? Try for a different sort, a better strain. . . .”

Brutal as was her allusion to her own mother, she was not brutal enough to talk of his, who had been far worse. And there was a sincerity in her earnest pleading that was not lost on him.

“Loody,” he said gently, “you are as right as rain; but it isn't the point.”

“What is, then? You could like her if you tried.”

“I'd better try not to. She isn't of our sort.”

"That's what I say," said Lady Louisa, not without a certain rough humility. "I don't want her to be—not altogether."

"And she knows what sort we are; she likes you—very much—I see that. But it is because of something in you, in spite of—of . . . She won't like *me*: she'll only think of me as a horsey, doggy, good-for-nothing . . . Here's Selvaggio."

"Bother Selvaggio!" said Lady Louisa, not, of course, quite loud enough for that gentleman to hear.

CHAPTER XIX

THOUGH Lady Louisa had said "Bother Selvaggio!" and meant it, because at the moment she wanted to talk business with her nephew, she nodded and smiled quite amiably as her guest came and joined them on the hearthrug.

"You've missed a very charming young lady by not coming down," she informed him.

"I was writing letters that must go by this post," he explained.

He had important letters to write almost every day, but he never troubled his friends by allusions to their nature. Of his own affairs he seldom spoke, as some people are tediously apt to do. Whatever his faults might be, Count Selvaggio knew how to refrain from boring his acquaintance by such confidences.

He was, perhaps, a couple of years older than Lord Helmstone, and not in any way like him. He was shorter, though not of low stature, and his figure, not stout yet, suggested that he might tend to fatness by the time he reached middle-age. His hands and feet were small, and so was his head: his complexion was extremely sallow; his eyes, hair, and eyebrows quite black. No doubt some people would call him handsome, and they could appeal, in justification of their opinion, to the regularity of his features, and the largeness of his eyes. Lady Louisa, without any such analysis, did think him handsome, and she liked him pretty well—her likes were, in general, much less decided than her dislikes. Lady Berengaria, who had never yet heard of his existence, but in due time was not only to see him, but to find herself compelled to form a judgment of him, when that time came disliked the man himself so much that his looks merely fitted in with her general disapprobation.

Count Selvaggio for several years had lived in London, but it was not, he said, his home. Where his home was he did not say. His name, or title (whichever it was) was etymologically Italian, but no one at the Italian Embassy knew, or at all events admitted that he knew, anything about him; and, dark as he was, his face was not Italian, as any Italian would have declared with certainty.

Lady Louisa had not, so far, felt any great cu-

riosity as to her guest's antecedents, or asked her nephew where he had picked up his friend. Helmstone often did pick up people, and nearly as often dropped them again. Whether Count Selvaggio was in society she certainly did not ask herself, for she knew that there are many sections of society, in some of which she herself would not have found a warm welcome. Neither did she debate in her own mind whether or no Count Selvaggio was quite a gentleman: some of her own cronies were not what Lady Berengaria would have thought gentlemen, and Lady Louisa did not find this foreigner vulgar, bumptious, or in any way ill-mannered. He did not seem to think himself too young to flirt discreetly with his hostess, and some of her flirtations had been indiscreet. They had been the silliest features of her life, for she had never cared much about them, always preferring horses to men, and yet had been injured in reputation by them. How very little she had cared is proved by the fact that she had never even been jealous when her admirers had transferred their attentions to some other quarter.

I hope it would interest my readers more to know why Lord Helmstone should like Count Selvaggio, than why his aunt should not dislike him. But, unfortunately, it must be confessed that Helmstone cared very little about what the poverty of the English language has led us to call his friend.

Hitherto he had been as idle and inconsequent in his choice of acquaintance as in most other matters: probably they had chosen him rather more than he had chosen them. Lady Louisa told herself that her nephew picked up odds and ends of friends, but it would have been quite as true to say that he let himself be picked up. How is a young man who has no motive in life to have any motive in the little bits of it that accrue day by day?

On this particular afternoon and evening Lady Louisa thought Count Selvaggio pleasanter than he had been before: he talked more, and took more pains to be agreeable, and evidently had more to say than she had suspected.

"He's no rattle-trap," she told herself, "but he knows how to fill a gap. And that's tact and good breeding. Helmstone is out of sorts, and his friend covers it up. A man who can do that is worth his victuals and drink, anyway. I'm glad he's here: if Helmstone and I were *tête-à-tête* it would be difficult not to notice his dumps, and it's better to leave him to himself. That girl has struck him. I hope he'll take it the right way. There was no fear of his being perky, but a little modesty in a young man goes a long way. Jacqueline is the only girl who ever depressed him like this. She's made him examine his conscience, and I expect it takes him all his time to find it. Selvaggio's a godsend

to me under the circumstances, and if this goes on he shall stop."

Lord Helmstone did not perceive the improvement in his friend: on the contrary, he listened to his talk with a half-inattentive criticism, and found it flat and empty. Male gossip he thought intolerable, and it quite surprised him to observe what a rich, if shallow, vein of it Count Selvaggio could strike. Lady Louisa, who had provided endless themes to the scandal-mongers for a quarter of a century, had no objection whatever to hear bits of scandal about other people. Like Charles II., she supposed most of her fellow-creatures were scoundrels, and thought not a penny the worse of them on that account. It kindled in her a sort of sense of good-fellowship, which was the nearest she could get to Christian charity. People who wrap themselves in sham sealskin believe themselves as warm as if it were the real fur.

To tell the truth, Helmstone to-night found his aunt's and his friend's talk depressing. He was fond of her, and she had some claims on his affection, for she had always been kind to him, in her own fashion, and his parents had been too busy about their own affairs to take much interest in him. He had never actually lived with Lady Louisa, but her house had been the nearest approach to a home he had ever known. In his school-days he had spent most of his holiday-time with her, and since

he had grown up he had always been accustomed to come and stay with her whenever he liked. But to-night it did strike him that the sort of talk he was listening to would disgust a girl like Jacqueline, and yet the talkers were typical of the kind of friends he had; and he did not set himself up as different from them, or better than them, but took it for granted that to Jacqueline he would seem just like them—one of a certain set. The expression of discontent which the clever artist had caught and reproduced in his portrait was particularly noticeable on his face to-night; but it was not the discontent of sour temper.

After dinner Lady Louisa did not at once leave the two young men alone, but stayed on, smoking a cigarette and drinking a glass of liqueur, after one of port. She did, however, go a few minutes before them.

"You'll find me in the billiard-room," she said, as they rose and Selvaggio went to open the door for her. To her nephew she gave a little smile, as if to say: "I know all about it. Cheer up, dear boy."

"I'm sorry I'm so stupid," he apologized. "I think I have got the toothache."

"I'm glad you're not quite sure," she retorted, with a little laugh. "I wouldn't mind an uncertain toothache now and then to have such beautiful teeth as you have."

When Selvaggio came back from closing the door upon his hostess Helmstone did not repeat his excuse, though his friend said:

"You've left me to do all the talking to-night. Down on your luck?"

"Not a bit. But I'm no good at that sort of talk."

"'Thank the Lord,' you mean."

"I don't feel in a specially thankful frame of mind."

"No. You've a bone to pick with Destiny, I should say. Spoiled children will quarrel with their nurses."

Helmstone slightly lifted his eyebrows: it certainly did not seem to him that he was a favourite of Fortune.

"I," said Selvaggio, "would think myself much indebted to the lady if I were a rich young peer not offensively ill-looking."

"I'm not a peer, as it happens."

"Well, a lord."

"And I haven't a sixpence."

"Ten-pound notes do as well. You always do have those when you want them—or the change for them."

"Do I, though!"

"Besides, you can marry them. I think you'd better," said Selvaggio, throwing his cigarette-end into the fire. "I would, if I were in your shoes."

"If you were in my shoes," said Helmstone, getting up, "your little feet would rattle about in them."

CHAPTER XX

AT Boon Court dinner-parties were out of the question; but from time to time a neighbour would be invited to dine there, usually some friend of Sir Jeremy's, or, within the last year or so, some friend of Frederick's. And now Lady Berengaria thought it necessary that Lady Louisa should be asked, partly moved by some cautious hint from Sir Jeremy to that effect.

When Jacqueline had gone over to Wildspur, on the occasion of her first meeting Lord Helmstone, she had been the bearer of a note of invitation from her aunt, and had brought back Lady Louisa's note of refusal and regrets—having her nephew and his friend with her, she could not leave them.

It seemed, then, to Lady Berengaria that nothing remained for her but to invite again, including Lady Louisa's guests in her invitation.

"You will get a good dinner," that lady declared to her young men, "those godly people always keep good cooks, and they're all rich together at Boon Court."

Count Selvaggio decided, when the time came, that Lady Louisa had been correct in both her statements. The dinner was excellent, and Boon

Court breathed affluence. He liked such houses, and foresaw that he should like Miss Joscelyn.

Eight is an awkward number at table, and there were eight, for a Miss Graystock was staying in the house, and Lady Adelgitha did not appear.

Miss Graystock was a cousin of Lady Berengaria's, and of hundreds of other desirable people: indeed, there were few counties in England where she had not what she called coaling-stations, for she spent at least half of every year moving from one country mansion to another, during which time her own compact and cosy little house in London was always very well let. She never went anywhere uninvited, but she often caused the invitation to be given by writing to announce her presence in the county itself or in one adjacent to it.

Miss Graystock was much older than Lady Berengaria, but she was much livelier, and by no means postponed all her pleasures to the world to come. She had known Berengaria and Adelgitha de Bohun all their lives, and for the former she had a deep and sincere respect, especially revering her for her tender devotion to her sister; nevertheless, she had an idea that life at Boon Court must be very sombre for a young girl like Jacqueline, and she had sometimes wondered that Berengaria herself did not seem more alive to it.

I am inclined to suspect that she had encouraged Lady Berengaria to think it incumbent on her to

write that second invitation to Lady Louisa Raffham, in which the nephew and his friend were included.

Of the friend she did not, on first seeing him, think much, setting him down in her mind as a nondescript foreigner. Lord Helmstone at once attracted her, for she liked young men to be handsome, and she did not object to their being modest and quiet. At dinner he sat on Lady Berengaria's right hand, and Miss Graystock was on Sir Jeremy's left, but between her and Lord Helmstone there was Jacqueline, and the old lady contrived to talk a good deal to her, and even across her to the young man, for Sir Jeremy had more of Lady Louisa's conversation than might have been the case had not Frederick been her other neighbour.

Jacqueline and Lord Helmstone found Miss Graystock very good company, for, though she did not talk scandal like Lady Louisa and Selvaggio, she had a pungent habit of speech, and had been looking at the world out of uncommonly shrewd eyes for nearly seventy years without getting tired of it. Probably Lord Helmstone would have had far less to say to Jacqueline if Miss Graystock had not been on the other side of her. To Lady Berengaria, it must be confessed, he said very little. She wished to be civil, and to do her duty fully as a hostess, but she was not a facile conversationalist, and she hardly knew what subjects to choose. She

imagined her guest to be a horsey, turfy young man about town, and she disliked London life, and for years had known nothing of it; and of horses she chiefly thought as useful animals for drawing broughams and landaus. She did her best, knowing it to be bad, but her neighbour thought her purposely stiff, and was convinced she disapproved of him. As a type she no doubt did disapprove of him, but it was chiefly as a type, for she was too honest as well as too charitable to disapprove of him as an individual, seeing that she knew nothing against him personally. Her idea was that young men of high rank should be also of high conduct, and if they failed to attempt anything of the kind, that they were injurious to England and to the best interests of society.

But she would much rather have talked to him herself than have seen him drawn into so much intimacy of conversation with Jacqueline by Miss Graystock. Amelia, she thought, was unnecessarily eager in promoting talk between the two young people. It did not occur to her that Amelia was doing it on purpose, though Lady Louisa perceived it very clearly.

"Poor Jacqueline!" thought Amelia, "I don't suppose that in this Moated Grange she ever sees any man but her ninny of a father and her prig of a brother. I know all about her handsome neighbour, and he's a naughty boy, no doubt: with such

a father and mother he'd be a miracle if he wasn't. But there's good stuff in him, or his face tells lies, and he's capable of improvement, it would be a pious work to help. The girl might help, and I suspect he'd be willing to let her if she would. She must be a change after his aunt or any women he's likely to meet under his aunt's wing."

So Miss Graystock made herself vastly pleasant, and conveyed quite clearly to the young man that she, at all events, did not disapprove of him. Jacqueline also gathered this, and was encouraged: evidently Cousin Amelia saw no harm in Lord Helmstone. She loved her Aunt Berengaria, and she only thought Cousin Amelia a cheerful companion, but she did say to herself: "Aunt Berengaria disapproves of everybody."

Lady Louisa, on the opposite side of the table, with Sir Jeremy at her left hand and his son at her right, did not enjoy herself so much, but she noted with satisfaction the animated conversation opposite, and was all the better pleased because she could see that it did not delight Lady Berengaria.

"I wonder," thought she, "what they talk about when they are alone: and they almost always are. If I were that girl I should have cut my throat long ago. Her aunt has nothing to say, and her father and brother worse than nothing. As for Sir Jeremy, it is a marvel to me that he can have lived eighteen years with Lady Berengaria and be such

a snob still. She is poisonous, but a lady all over."

Count Selvaggio did not decide that Lady Berengaria was poisonous. He admired nothing more sincerely than high birth, and he knew that no lady in Europe, not of royal rank, was of higher birth than his hostess. He declared to himself that it was apparent in every tone of her quiet voice, in her pose, in her manners, and even in her plainness. Her plainness he found distinguished, as also the rich plainness of her dress and its unaffected disregard of fashion. That she, as an aunt, should be plain he found not at all out of place; with the young lady opposite it was a different matter. She was a niece, and it was equally correct that she should be, as he studiously noted, a lovely girl. She also was distinguished, so greatly so that it seemed odd to Selvaggio that the youth on his left should be her brother till he recollected that Frederick Joscelyn had no de Bohun blood in his veins, but only Sir Jeremy's and that of the Cruickshanks family, which the Count thoroughly despised.

Lady Berengaria found Count Selvaggio much easier to get on with than her other neighbour. He did not talk a great deal—to her—but he knew how to find subjects that they could handle between them, and she was quite able to perceive that he was clever, though he rather concealed than paraded it. All the same, she was not attracted by

him, and Frederick made up his mind that she thought him objectionable.

Frederick himself behaved to Selvaggio as he supposed an expert attaché would behave to a dubious guest whom his chief was entertaining, not grudgingly, but of necessity. It was Frederick Joscelyn's secret ambition to be an expert attaché, and he was always privately in training for it, which made his sister often think him mysterious and dimly oracular, for he considered mysteriousness and a Delphic habit of speech signs of vocation—to diplomacy.

CHAPTER XXI

BEFORE dinner Selvaggio had not exchanged a dozen words with Jacqueline, but later on it happened that something drew her attention strongly to him. She, Lady Louisa, Frederick, and the Count were standing near the piano in the saloon, a very large octagonal room, larger still than the drawing-room in which the party had assembled before dinner. It was entirely bare of the minutiae of adornment so dear to Lady Louisa, but the pictures on the green damask-silk walls were, as Selvaggio could very well recognize, portraits, by great masters, of men and women who had themselves been great people in their day.

"Will you sing for us?" Selvaggio asked, turning almost abruptly to Jacqueline.

"I can't," she replied simply.

"Oh, perhaps you can," her brother remarked cheerfully. "You've never tried."

"There," said the girl, laughing, "you can believe Frederick. He tells you that I've never even tried."

"I would rather believe your face even than your brother," said Selvaggio. "It declares that you could sing if you would try."

"Well, I shan't try on the present company, at any rate. Those experiments should be made in private."

"You'd better ask him to sing himself, Jacqueline," said Lady Louisa.

"Oh, do!" Jacqueline begged. "Aunt Berengaria, we are trying to make Count Selvaggio sing for us."

"It would be very kind of him," said Lady Berengaria, who played the organ in church and did not care much for music.

"Now, Selvaggio," said Louisa, "go and sing."

Lady Berengaria shivered: she had hardly expected to hear a young man called by his surname, *tout court*, in her drawing-room by a lady.

Count Selvaggio, without more ado, sat down at the piano, but did not at once begin singing. At first he played for a minute or two, and it was not the accompaniment of his song, but a kind of prelude to it. The song, when it came, seemed to

interpret and sum up the meaning of the prelude, as it had itself given the keynote of the song. By the time he began to sing they were all listening, as he meant they should. He was worth listening to, and he knew it very well.

Jacqueline had hardly ever heard any fine singing, and the little she had heard had left her unmoved. She had supposed herself to be quite unmusical. But now she was almost instantly arrested, and was conscious of a wholly new emotion. That which Selvaggio sang was the second chorus in the *Atalanta in Calydon*, which begins:

“Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran.”

It was no smooth love-song, but bitter and salt, like sea-foam, and piteous like wind-driven rain in a day of the dead year.

“Eyesight and speech they wrought
For the veils of the soul therein. . . .
His speech is a burning fire;
With his lips he travaileth.
In his heart is a blind desire,
In his eyes foreknowledge of death;
He weaves, and is clothed with derision;
Sows, and he shall not reap;
His life is a watch or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep.”

Everyone listened, and no one, listening, failed

to be aware that the singer not only had a voice of marvellous sympathy as well as beauty, but that he could do wonderful things with it and with the instrument under his hands. Though the verses are long enough, he did not take long in the singing of them. Every word was clear and distinct, but he sang with a sort of rush, like the passionate hurry of a wind. It sounded like a vehement, fierce protest against the arch-foe Fate, most potent and ruthless of the gods. That it was bitterly heathen no one perceived more promptly than Lady Berengaria, and she utterly contemned and hated it. Frederick also saw that it was sheer heathenism, and he put it down as a singular exhibition of bad taste on the part of the performer in such a place as his aunt's saloon. Sir Jeremy thought it a pagan sort of ditty, but did not distinguish between it and the sort of smooth addresses to Apollo he could remember hearing in his younger days.

Jacqueline could very well understand that it was un-Christian, but was not outraged. How could she be outraged when she found something like undiscovered chords, that she suddenly knew were part of her nature, vibrating to it? The words were, she thought, almost intolerably beautiful, and the words were only half: they were no more than the slim, pale body of that spirit which hid itself in the wonderful music. If the whole thing was outside Christianity, was not that because it dealt

with old emotions and passions that had beaten the heart of man before Christianity came? It was pagan because it was pre-Christian. Sorrow and pain were older than Christianity, older than the great Hebrew Church which was the forerunner and prophet of Christianity.

She did not argue thus, but this was the unworded attitude of her mind—or rather of her super-sensitive emotion.

She certainly did not say to herself that for the time she had had too much Christianity, that therefore it was that this deep and angry cry of pagan protest against the irresponsible gods found its echo within herself, alert to waken. But it was so. She had rushed off unbidden and sat down to a table whither she was not invited, and there she had, like a spiritual glutton, swallowed down meats too high and strong for her, without capacity to digest or assimilate them: she had gone on, with all the eager appetite of her hungry nature till the very taste had become hateful to her. She had tried to gorge her soul with the hard food of the saints, who was nothing in the least like a saint, till it had almost killed her soul, as bodies may be almost killed by too much meat. And the result was a revulsion against that whole diet. For the moment it was the sheer emptiness of paganism that appealed to her. It offered no meat, no drink, and therefore she turned to it with unconscious relief.

After a surfeit there is something appealing in starvation.

What Selvaggio put before her was not any demand of heathen gods to man's allegiance, but the indignant protest of man against the incubus of any such allegiance. Had his song been any silly comparison between the Christ she had known and the half-disreputable masters of Olympus, whom she would have known to be beneath even herself, it would have entirely failed to present to her anything real. There was no such comparison. The protest came (or, indeed, pretended to come) from hearts that had never known Christ, hearts full of bitter rebellion against the Omnipotence they did know, an Omnipotence in which there was no love and no pity. To them the heavens were like brass, as hard and as glittering, the aloof seat of serene and supreme selfishness, where man's masters reigned unvexed by, and heedless of, the world-old agony of man.

Jacqueline did not consciously perceive that the lyric was an exquisite embodiment of the profoundest of all pessimisms—that which says there are gods, indeed, but they are worse than men; that heaven is crueller than earth, more heartless and more irresponsible.

Master Frederick withdrew from what he shrewdly felt to be the storm-zone round the piano, and went across to where Miss Graystock was

sitting by the fire, and where Lady Louisa was now also sitting.

"I couldn't make it all out," said Miss Graystock, "but he seems to know how to sing and how to play too."

"I think," said Lady Louisa in a lower tone than she usually employed, "he has fluttered the doves a bit. He has been singing Swinburne."

"H'm! Swinburne!" And Miss Graystock elevated her eyebrows. "He's not exactly a drawing-room poet."

"Oh!" explained Lady Louisa, "it was nothing fie-fie. Only a wail against the old Greek gods."

"An angry indictment of them," added Frederick.

"Well, *we're* not concerned to stick up for them," said Miss Graystock. "That don't hurt us. 'Rather the contrary,' as Mr. Jorrocks said."

"Lady Berengaria," whispered Lady Louisa, "is so pious that she doesn't approve of blasphemy even against false gods."

Sir Jeremy now strolled over. He felt that something a little puzzling was in the air, and he had a vague sense that Jacqueline was somehow annoying her aunt. That young lady was not talking to Count Selvaggio or to anyone, but his singing had brought into her face a singular expression of excited emotion. Lord Helmstone was trying not to watch her.

Lady Berengaria saw both him and Jacqueline, and she could perceive a sort of trouble in his eyes, and it did not make her feel less gently towards him. She almost told herself that she liked him better than the other one. He was wholesomer. He was simple, honest, and English. The other man was certainly not English, nor was he honest or simple. There was something subterraneous about him, as, she thought, there was about his singing. It meant more than appeared, and what did appear was, to her thinking, bad, morbid, and subtly profane.

Selvaggio was still playing, not connectedly, and presently he sang again, but almost to himself. Jacqueline was nearest to him, and heard every word:

"A landmark seen across the way
Where one race treads as the other trod;
An evil sceptre, an evil stay,
Wrought for a staff, wrought for a rod,
The bitter jealousy of God.
For death is deep as the sea,
And Fate as the waves thereof.
Shall the waves take pity on thee,
Or the south wind offer thee love?
Wilt thou take the night for thy day,
Or the darkness for light on thy way,
Till thou say in thy heart, Enough?
Behold, thou art over fair, thou art over wise.
The sweetness of spring in thine hair, and the light in thine
eyes.

The light of the spring in thine eyes, and the sound in thine ears;

Yet thy heart shall wax heavy with sighs and thine eyelids with tears."

He did not sing these words straight on, connectedly, as they are written, but with pauses filled by phrases of music, and the last few lines he sang so low that no one but the girl could hear them.

When he had finished them, he got up and walked away to where Lady Louisa was sitting with Miss Graystock, Sir Jeremy, and his son. Jacqueline had not said one word to him or to anyone about his music. Presently she also left her place, and sat down alone. She did not belong to either of the two groups.

"I wonder," said Helmstone in a low voice to his hostess, "why you don't like it? I can see you do not."

"Do *you*?"

"No, but I don't think I quite know why. I confess this: it gives me a different idea of Selvaggio. I didn't think he could do anything much. He can do that, at any rate."

Lady Berengaria did not deny that he 'could do that.' But she looked as if his power to do it did not please her, and Helmstone, who had plenty of instinct, as many unbrilliant creatures have, was aware that there was between him and this stiff old maid a sympathy that had not been there when

they were seated side by side at dinner. He knew quite well that Selvaggio had acquired a certain power or influence over Jacqueline, and, apart from personal feelings, it gave him an uneasy, suspicious sense, and he was pretty sure that it affected the girl's aunt in the same way.

"He is my guest and your friend," she said quietly, "and I shall not say what I think."

In making such a remark, which was not of a sort she was used to, she did say what she thought.

"Lady Berengaria, he is *my* guest (or my aunt's) rather than my friend. I know him rather well—or not at all, as you may put it."

("One should choose one's friends.") Lady Berengaria did not say this, but Lord Helmstone quite understood that she meant it.

Out loud she asked:

"Is he Italian? He has not what I suppose to be an Italian face."

"I really don't know. His title is Italian. But he lives in England, and, as you see, he has not an Italian accent, or any particular accent."

Lady Berengaria was resolving that, wherever he might come from, he should not, so far as it lay with her, come much to Boon Court. More than ever she regretted the nearness of Wildspur Grange.

That very night, before they had all gone to bed, Miss Graystock made a proposal which Lady

Berengaria received with more immediate cordiality than she had expected.

"When I go away on Saturday," Amelia had suggested, "I wish you would let me take Jacqueline with me. I shall be in London for a couple of months, and it would amuse me to take her about. Will you let her come with me?"

CHAPTER XXII

"BERENGARIA——"

"Well, Addy?" And her sister looked up from the household accounts she was conscientiously auditing with that peculiarly sweet and gentle smile that was always ready for poor Adelgitha.

"Am I interrupting you?"

"Not a bit. You never do interrupt me, Addy."

"I was thinking of something. This Sir Jeremy——"

The smile on Berengaria's lips and in her eyes faded: not because she was angry or cross, for never in all the long years since her sister's wits had gone astray had she been cross or angry with her, but because nothing pained her more than the way in which Addy would often speak of her husband.

"This Sir Jeremy Bentham——"

"Joscelyn, Addy."

"Oh yes! Joscelyn. (Do you think it matters

much?) This Sir Jeremy—is he quite behaving himself?”

“Oh, Addy, yes. What do you mean?”

“Well, I was thinking he wasn’t. These people who dined here last night—they were *his* guests, weren’t they?”

“I invited them, Addy.”

“Of course, or they could not have been here. But it was *his* idea, eh? I don’t believe they were your sort—*our* sort, indeed. Of course that Lady Louisa something——”

“Raffham.”

“Raffham! (What an ill-conducted sort of name!) I was going to say she is, in a fashion, of our class, but not of our *monde*, all the same. I saw you all go in to dinner. I was up in the gallery and saw you quite well. The two young men—who was the black-avised fellow?”

“A Count Selvaggio.”

“From where on earth? He looked like—well, he didn’t look like anything I have ever seen in any house of ours. Is *he* some relation of Sir Jeremy Bentham? That Lady Louisa is, I think you said.”

“His sister-in-law. Count Selvaggio is no relation of either of them.”

“I shouldn’t think he was any relation of anybody’s that anyone ever heard of. Who played the piano? Who sang?”

"He did, Addy."

"Did you like it?"

"No, Addy. But, you know, I'm not very musical, and I believe he sang well, and played well."

"Did he bring his monkey? He looked like an organ-grinder. What did Jacqueline think of him?"

"I think she was impressed by his music."

"Heavens and earth! Berengaria, that girl will give you trouble. You shouldn't have adopted her. You *call* her your niece, don't you?"

"No, Addy—no, dear. She is my real niece: my own niece."

"I thought that perky prig of a lad was her brother."

"Yes, dear, she is his sister."

"But *he* is not your nephew. I know he isn't. He belongs to Sir Jeremy——"

"Sir Jeremy is his father——"

"There! It is quite ridiculous to me to hear you talk as if Sir Jeremy's son could be your nephew——"

"Frederick is not really my nephew——"

"Ah, ha! What did I say? Adopted. Adopted nephew, and adopted niece. What I was thinking was this—Sir Jeremy isn't behaving very pretty. He is bringing queer people here. That sort of man does. He is sure to have queer people tacked on to him. Do you know, Berengaria, I once knew

a man horribly like him? I did. Long ago. I was travelling abroad; you weren't there, nor papa. But I was. And there was a man in attendance—a courier, I suppose. He took the railway-tickets, and looked after the luggage, and paid the hotel bills. One couldn't get out of his way—wherever one turned, there was my gentleman—all whisker and forehead and smile. You know the sort of smile, full of fine teeth, and all about nothing. This Sir Jeremy here might be his elder brother. The courier-man was younger and handsomer, in that smug, trusted-dependent kind of manner. Very well-to-do, you know, and dressed *à quatre épingles*. I never can see Sir Jeremy without thinking of him, and that is why I so much dis——”

“Addy, dear! don't. Don't let us talk of Sir Jeremy to-day.”

“Ah, but to-day is just the day that one must. You are fond of Jacqueline (and I admit her good looks)—well, this Sir Jeremy will help her to misbehave, with his Lady Louisas and his Counts—what's the name? Arpeggio?”

“Selvaggio.”

“Does it matter much—Arpeggio, Selvaggio? He is worse than the courier-man, for he's here, and the courier was dismissed. I suppose he was: for he and his smile were discontinued. If I had *my* way, Sir Jeremy would be discontinued too. I

suppose you keep him on because you converted him. He *is* a Catholic—eh?”

“A very good one.”

“No doubt. In this house they have to be. Is the Arpeggio man a Catholic too?”

“I really don’t know. If he is an Italian I suppose he is.”

“We’ve met Italians—of our own world: they weren’t like *him*. I compared him with the footmen, and would rather have gone in to dinner with one of them. Poor Berengaria!”

“I went in with Lord Helmstone.”

“Yes, but—who is *he* at all?”

“Lady Louisa’s nephew.”

“*That’s* his certificate! What a crew! But he was by far the best of it. He looked honest. And he wasn’t sly; nor oily; nor subterraneous. And he is not loud. The aunt is as loud as a pair of check breeches.”

“Oh, Addy!”

“So she is! And loud people are often above-board, but *she* isn’t. She’ll do you a bad turn, and she’ll do it through that girl Jacqueline. If you stood alone she could no more touch you than if you were that cloud up in the sky out there. She could only make faces at the cloud, or throw dirt at it. Berengaria! we are de Bohuns, and what have *we* to do with Raff—Raffles, and Arpeggios,

and Jeremy Diddlers? There goes the son, Jeremy Diddler junior, mincing across the garden and calling on the rhododendrons to witness that he's the model youth. Not that his pretty sister agrees with him. He'd like to hector her, and she snubs him instead. She is welcome to do that; only I won't have her bothering *you*, Berengaria. . . . Did the other young man, Lord——"

"Helmstone."

"Did *he* play the piano?"

"No. I don't think that's his line at all."

"Fast? Horsey?"

"I really don't know what he is, Addy."

"You seemed to know what his line is."

"I could see he did not admire Count Selvaggio's songs."

"What *did* he admire? Amelia Graystock?"

Adelgitha asked this question with a queer tilt of her pretty eyebrows that was almost equivalent to a wink.

"I didn't detect it," answered Berengaria, laughing, "though he made himself very agreeable to her. By the way, Amelia is leaving on Saturday, and she is taking Jacqueline with her, for a couple of months."

"Ah! There'll be no Arpeggios at Amelia's. She hasn't very big doors to her little house, and only the best company can squeeze through them."

CHAPTER XXIII

JACQUELINE herself was grateful to Miss Graystock for her invitation, and not sorry to get away from Boon Court for a while. She felt herself out of tune with it; in fact, her whole life, whether she knew it or not, was out of tune. She was restless, weary, and dissatisfied—not least with herself, perhaps, but certainly not with herself only. Her brother rasped her nerves, and her mother (to whose madness it had been the effort of her life to be blind) treated her with a bright and hard aloofness. The least attempt at display of affection on her daughter's part Adelgitha rejected, either with a sharp playfulness or with a sharpness that was not even playful.

"My dear, go to Berengaria; that's where you belong," she said once. "You're not *my* adopted. You're very pretty, but I can admire you better a little further off. The loveliest thing I know is a sunset, and I never dreamt of kissing one."

Jacqueline, who had been kneeling by her mother's chair, got up, and stood shamefacedly before her.

"Dear mamma," she was beginning, "Aunt Berengaria——"

"Pray do not call me 'mamma': you do not even call my sister *that*, who *has* adopted you. I don't

like the sort of thing. I'm your very good friend—that must content you. If I wanted an adopted daughter, I shouldn't steal away Berengaria's. Be more loving to *her*, and don't abuse her kindness. Don't be a worry to her. If you cry, I shall have indigestion. The sight of tears turns all my food acid. I hate laughing and crying people. For as many years as you've been in the world no one has ever seen me cry, no one has ever heard me laugh."

Afterwards Adelgitha urgently requested her sister to forbid the girl ever calling her 'mamma.' She had long ago been equally insistent that Sir Jeremy must not presume.

"Berengaria, I *desire* you to warn him," she had said, almost passionately, "to keep his place. He called me 'My dear!' You may imagine how I stared. A thick-skinned fellow! My look the stuffed bustard in the housekeeper's room would have understood, but *he* didn't. I know my wits go out on their own account, wandering without leave: but of one thing I *am* clear—I am a de Bohun. (*You* know very well that the Howards never cropped up till our family was in its dotage.) And do you suppose I will let Sir Jeremy Joscelyn *My dear* me?"

But glad as Jacqueline was to get away, she was not to escape quite so soon as she had thought. Miss Graystock caught cold, and, having all her

life been as strong as a horse, the least illness always frightened her. Her argument appeared to be, 'I never am ill, so I must be very ill indeed.'

She now thought herself so ill that she did not care to see Berengaria linger in her room. She dreaded lest she should propose a visit from the chaplain, and *that* she knew would be like a hint to prepare for the worst. She much preferred Jacqueline's visits, and the girl was very good-natured in spending long hours in the sick-room, cheering the old lady. They became superficially very intimate, though it never once occurred to Jacqueline to confide in or open her heart to this shrewd and experienced, world-skilled old friend. She paid Amelia a long visit every morning, leaving her when the doctor arrived, who never declared his patient's indisposition to be entirely trifling.

"No cause for alarm whatever," he assured her. "Not the very smallest cause. But it is a nasty cold, and the weather is bleak. You are safest where you are; and, Miss Graystock, a *neglected* cold *may* be serious. And I should say your constitution was sensitive."

She had almost feared he would say something about her time of life, but she had no objection to hearing her constitution (which was splendid) called sensitive.

Jacqueline came to her room again for tea, and stayed there till it was time to go and dress for

dinner. After luncheon Miss Graystock liked to go to sleep, and her maid generally reported her 'resting' if Lady Berengaria came up to inquire in the early afternoon. After luncheon, therefore, Jacqueline went out, and usually on horseback, accompanied (when she could not help it) by her brother; when she was luckier, attended only by a groom.

"Where shall we go?" Frederick asked her, on one of the less fortunate occasions.

"I am going to Wildspur."

"To Wildspur! They called yesterday."

"Exactly. And Lady Louisa asked me to go over to tea there to-day. I told her that I couldn't do that, as Cousin Amelia likes me to have tea with her in her room, but that I should ride over early."

"Did you tell Aunt Berengaria?"

"No. But you can."

Frederick was offended, though he certainly *would* tell, and he rode by her side for a minute or two in huffed silence.

"I can't for the life of me perceive," he said at last, "the necessity for all this running after these Wildspur people."

"It is not running after Lady Louisa to accept an invitation to go and see her. If you don't perceive that, I'm afraid I can't help you."

Another silence. Then:

"That Sicilian, or Italian, or whatever he may

be, is thoroughly objectionable," says Master Frederick.

"You mean you thoroughly object to him."

"I certainly do. So do we all."

"All, Frederick?"

"Yes; I, Aunt Berengaria, your mother."

"My mother never saw him. But, Frederick, I wish you would not bring her in just now. You know she is—more ill than usual."

"And your conduct will not make her better."

"My conduct!"

"Yes. You are on the wrong tack altogether. And I choose to show you that I see it. Our father does not notice things——"

"Things that don't exist! No, I don't think he does. And once for all let me tell you, Frederick, that whatever you may 'choose,' I shall not choose to let you assume our father's authority towards me."

Frederick was much less acute of perception than his sister, but he had more common sense, and he was not merely misled by prejudice in his dislike of the idea of any sort of intimacy between his sister and Count Selvaggio, but the prejudice was there, and of that Jacqueline was more aware than of his good intentions. He did mean well, but he had no gift of tact, and he also lacked that higher gift of sympathy which often acts effectively without tact.

Of his absence of sympathy his sister was as conscious as that he was conceited and overbearing.

"Since you came back from that convent," he said, after another silence, "you have been altogether unmanageable."

This allusion made her angry.

"It certainly is the case that I shall not be managed by you," she replied, "though it is true that my going was a mistake. I know very well, Frederick, that I make mistakes."

"And if you are warned against them you make them all the more obstinately."

"I don't think I really am obstinate." Nor was she, though she was self-willed and impetuous. "But, Frederick, whether my going to the convent was wrong or right, it had this effect at all events: it aged me. I went away almost a child, and I have come back, to all intents and purposes, a woman, and to all intents and purposes really older than you are. You are not a very boyish boy, but you are not yet a man, and I am a woman. It is a pity you cannot understand."

She put her horse to a trot, and their talk was ended.

CHAPTER XXIV

LADY LOUISA received them both in her best manner. To Frederick she was more cordial than usual, and contrived to make him feel flattered. With his

sister she was gentle and affectionate. Throughout their visit she said nothing 'loud' or provocative. If Frederick on his return should make a report it could not be very unfavourable. And he was well enough pleased to find that his aunt could behave as he thought aunts should. On the plea of showing him a portrait of his grandfather, she took him to another room and kept him there some time while she questioned him, with great show of interest, as to his future.

"Of course," she declared, "you will make a career. You have brains—and (excuse me) ambition: I wish poor Helmstone had. He would be happier. After all, ambition is the rudder of a young man's ship. You are entering diplomacy? Yes, but I dare say you will go into Parliament as well. I suppose not quite at once."

Frederick could talk better on the subject she had chosen than on any other, and while he spoke of himself she listened with apparent sympathy. For the moment he was inclined to think that she had purposely made the worst of herself before Lady Berengaria. She was certainly making the best of herself to him, and it flattered him. She even made him a present—a miniature of a lady.

"Your great-grandfather," said she, "was a patron of miniaturists, and this one (by a protégé of his) is a fancy picture of one of his daughters—

my great-aunt Julia—as Hermione. I thought you might like to have it.”

It might, for all she knew, represent her great-aunt, and have been by a protégé of her grandfather’s; for she had picked it up at Venice, and knew nothing whatever about it.

Meanwhile, Jacqueline was in the drawing-room, and so was Selvaggio. Lord Helmstone should have been there, but was not; for, two minutes after Lady Louisa and Frederick had left it, a card had been brought to him by a footman, and the name on the card had not suggested to him a gentleman to be introduced to Jacqueline.

“Where is Mr. Hounslow?” he had asked the servant.

“In the stable-yard, my lord. He is riding one horse and leading another.”

The second horse was, as Helmstone knew, one whose purchase had been proposed to him.

So Jacqueline and Selvaggio were left alone—for perhaps ten minutes.

“One should not,” said he, “talk of oneself, but I do not think I *am* talking merely of myself if I say how it pleased me to perceive, on the night we dined at Boon Court, that what I played and what I sang interested you. There is no egoism in music—or in poetry. Nor were you thinking of the performer—that is why I feel I can speak of it.”

"No, I was thinking of the words you sang, and of the music that carried them."

"'Carried them,'" said he gravely, "is good. Some words are a message, and need a messenger to bring them."

He paused a moment, and then added:

"Such message as my music bore was not very pleasing to most of my auditors that night."

"No," the girl answered simply.

"It did not matter. When one has but six or eight auditors it ought to satisfy even ambition to catch the ear of one. Mind, I did not, I do not, ask you to *approve* the message—but I knew before I delivered it that you would *appreciate* it. One appreciates (if one has the faculty of appreciation) the eloquence of a preacher whose doctrine one knows to be false. For myself, I could appreciate the skill, the eloquence, the force of a counsel pleading against my own life if I were on trial for it."

Again he paused, somewhat thoughtfully; and it seemed to Jacqueline that he was in imagination surveying a scene, a picture. She did not interrupt his musing, and he soon went on:

"The message my music carried was not anti-Christian; it was altogether pre-Christian.—the cry of the pagan spirit outraged by the insouciance of the gods: who, as regards men, were sharp meddlers, never divine beneficers—is beneficers

good English? They had their petted favourites (whom they could, and did, petulantly discard), much oftener they had in hand helpless humans whom they pursued with malignant spite. So their cold potency was an insult and offence to men brave enough to scorn and defy it. To me this seems profoundest tragedy—responsible, conscious impotence, consciously wronged, in arms (with pre-certainty of defeat) against irresponsible aggressive omnipotence."

A third time he paused, and Jacqueline silently nodded acquiescence.

"It," he then continued, "has nothing to do with Christ at all. No heights could be further apart than Calvary and Olympus. That is why the Christ-epic was to the Greeks foolishness. The message my music bore is no subtle whisper of treason towards pitiful Calvary, but the echo of an old, wistful revolt against pitiless Olympus."

What more he might have said, or wished to say, cannot be surmised, for Helmstone returned, and, two minutes afterwards, his aunt and her other nephew. With Helmstone, on that occasion, Jacqueline had no *tête-à-tête* at all.

That what Selvaggio had said, so far as it went, was what he meant to say may be taken for granted. He was not vague and purposeless, like Helmstone, his motives were mostly clearly realized by himself, and his words and actions adjusted to them.

Though in reality it would have given him more pleasure to have sat, even silent, and listened to the girl's beautiful and vibrant voice, and watched her lovely face while she spoke, than to hear his own voice, he knew what he was about. He wanted her to think of him, and to make her do so he had been clever enough to choose a subject greater than himself, of profound and passionate appeal, satisfied that in recurrence to the thoughts he might have aroused in her she would not forget him. He was too ambitious to want only all she might have, he wanted to win herself with it. He was to his inmost marrow an intriguer, but he could not be content to intrigue simply for money.

After their brief *tête-à-tête* was over he hardly spoke to her, and of the *tête-à-tête* Lady Louisa was unaware. She now devoted herself to Jacqueline, and contrived to bring Helmstone into their conversation. Selvaggio sat down close to Frederick.

"You and my cousin Helmstone," said the latter, "are intimate friends, I think? Though we are first-cousins, I barely know him."

"We are friends," Selvaggio answered, "but I don't know that I am *intimate* with anybody."

This happened to be quite true, but Frederick, in training for diplomacy, did not believe it. He had an idea that Selvaggio would never volunteer a truthful statement, whereas he never lied when it seemed unnecessary.

Frederick smiled, and stroked the side of his boot with his riding-crop.

"We are just accidental friends," added Selvaggio.

"Did you meet abroad?"

"We met in Italy. He was staying with your aunt and his own. She was then renting part of an old palace at Venice. To *her* I was first introduced by the Duca di Casa Bianca."

"Ah! upon the burning deck?"

Selvaggio did not understand this witty allusion, but as Frederick evidently considered himself *à-couché* of a *bon mot*, he smiled.

"Perhaps," the youth suggested nonchalantly, "you are Venetian yourself?" ('A Venetian blind,' he thought, quite troubled that he must enjoy so brilliant a pleasantry for its own sake and without applause.)

"Me? No, I am not Venetian. My title is Sicilian."

"I knew a Sicilian at Oxford, said Frederick, with more frank animation; "his mother was English—the Prince of Grangiardino."

"They live in Palermo. But it is nothing."

"What is nothing?"

"The Grangiardino family. There are Sicilian Princes who are much, and there are some who are very little."

"Is it not a genuine title?"

"Oh, quite genuine. And old too. But the title is all there is. Mind, I do not mean that there never was a time when the Principe di Grangiardino was not a *persona*: two hundred years ago he was, so to speak, *personissima*. But the family has dwindled, dwindled, and is now—nothing."

"Do you mean that they are poor?"

"They are certainly poor—as poor as possible. A penniless Prince is not much. But it isn't only that. Some families go on making alliances that buttress them—increase their influence, their power, their wealth. This family for many generations has done the opposite. It has gone on marrying people of no consequence. The mother of your Prince Giulio——"

"Ah, you know his name!"

"Oh yes. There is only one other son—Enrico—it isn't hard to remember. The English mother was very pretty, and quite well bred, but of no consequence: a Miss Maria Trumble, niece of the British Consul at Palermo."

"You seem," said Frederick, not without a certain respect, "to know all about the bigs and littles of Sicilian society."

"If you move about the world (I do not mean *run* about it) and are in any society yourself, it is not difficult to know the bigs and littles. You soon find that in each country there are people who count, and people who don't. The latter may have

as pretty labels as the former. Why—" and now Selvaggio smiled "—even here in your sublimatic England (which I entirely revere) there may be a Lady Salisbury and a Lady Sniggles, and the simple-minded Latin might imagine that the same title meant the same thing, wholly unaware that Lady Sniggles was the widow of a fishmonger."

Frederick also smiled—approvingly. But Selvaggio added: "And even among English Earls star differeth from star in glory—a de Bohun Earl, representing a family whose head was an Earl under the Plantagenets, and, say, an Earl of—Camberwell, who had no ancestors when Queen Victoria was born; for I think that dexterous barrister who became Lord Chancellor and the first Earl was the son of a college porter and a college laundress."

This conversation convinced Frederick of two things—that Count Selvaggio was not a negligible quantity, and that it was much pleasanter to hear him gibing at the Camberwell title than it would be to hear him comparing the Earl who was Frederick's own grandfather with the Earl who was his sister's only.

"Do all Sicilians speak English as well as you do?" he inquired politely.

"No, for most Sicilians do not speak it at all. For that matter, Sicily is not entirely my home. I have not lived there latterly, and may never live

there again." To himself he said: "Does this hobledehoy think—does he *really* think!—that *he* is going to pump *me*—unless I allow it and intend it and choose it?"

CHAPTER XXV

By the time Miss Graystock considered herself well enough to leave Boon Court, Jacqueline had met Lady Louisa and her two guests again more than once. On no occasion, however, had Lord Helmsstone done anything to further his aunt's views with reference to that young lady. He admired her a great deal more than Lady Louisa guessed, but he did not flatter himself that Miss Joscelyn attached any importance whatever to the fact of his existence. Whatever graces he might lack, he had that of humility, and believed himself incapable of interesting her. That he did not interest her was true enough, but not because of any essential deficiency in himself, had she really known him. It did not occur to her that there was much to know. That he was a very handsome young man she knew rather from his portrait than from himself, though it by no means flattered him; for, whereas she had studied the picture with interest, she never studied the original at all. Nor did she pay much attention to masculine good looks; they belong to out-sides, and she did not care for the surface of things.

For the rest, he only struck her as a silent young man, who was probably wise in not talking much, as he would not be likely to have a great deal to say. The gentleness and deference of his manner appeared to her no more than inoffensive. Though her brother's masterfulness irritated her to angry opposition, she was not attracted by mere meekness in a man. It happened, on the day before her own and Miss Graystock's departure for London, that her father, who had been out riding and met Lord Helmstone, brought him in to luncheon.

Lady Adelgitha was in one of her best moods, and she made herself pleasant to the young man, whose gentle deference to *her* did win Jacqueline's approval. From his aunt he had heard of Lady Adelgitha as a mere lunatic, and as, when they had dined at Boon Court, she had not appeared, he had supposed her to be shut up somewhere. He saw at once that she was not at all what he had imagined. Still beautiful in face and figure, she held herself as a great lady, and her manner to him was not flighty, but gracious and kind. She talked quietly and without sharpness, but with occasional flashes of peculiar shrewdness. If he was able to perceive that her stepson was obnoxious to her tastes, it did not prejudice him against her, for he was not much enamoured of his young cousin.

"He," thought Lady Adelgitha, "is not a fool, though he won't set the Thames on fire, and won't

try. I hate the people who are always trying. But he is a gentleman, and he is well-bred. And he is not in the least loud."

At another time she said to herself:

"Miss Jacqueline thinks 'small beer' of him. It's a pity he doesn't think the same of her. It would do her good. What bad taste she has!—and *that* she never learned from Berengaria."

After luncheon she had him almost to herself in a corner of the big saloon near a window.

"The night you dined here," she said, "I heard music. Was it you?"

"Oh no. I can't do anything like that. It was a friend of mine——"

"Oh! a friend."

"Yes; Count Selvaggio: he is staying with my aunt at Wildspur, and Lady Berengaria kindly asked us all."

"So you don't do 'anything like that'?" said Lady Adelgitha, not disapprovingly.

"Me? Oh no; I am not—accomplished."

"I hope not! An accomplished man! It sounds fearful. You don't wail of the Ineffable, and play enigmatic sonatas?"

"I *couldn't*, you know, if I tried."

"Don't try!"

"I can certainly promise not to try. But Selvaggio doesn't have to try. His music is very fine."

"How do you know? Perhaps he told you!"

"Oh no! He is not that sort of fellow. He is not conceited. But people who really know—they all say his music and singing are splendid."

"And you—do you like it yourself?"

"I am not sufficiently a judge."

"Come, Lord Helmstone! We are all judges of what we like. Did you care for his music and singing that night here?"

"I didn't care for what he sang, though I think he sang wonderfully."

"What did he sing?"

"I never heard it before, and perhaps I didn't fully take it in. It seemed to be—oh, I don't know—a sort of fierce outcry of us—man, I mean—against ['God' he was going to say, and substituted, partly out of shyness] 'heaven.'"

"Dear me! Count Selvaggio against heaven. He doesn't like the idea of heaven! Well, perhaps he has his reasons, like the man who had personal objections to believing in—the other place."

Her manner, still not flighty, was so whimsical that Helmstone could not help laughing.

"Perhaps," he tried to explain, "I didn't do it justice. It's a bit above me, you know, all that."

"Heaven? Well, yes, it's a bit above us all. But I like your humility better than your friend's—you said he was your friend, I think?—your friend's high-mightiness."

As it happened, Helmstone was destined to enjoy a short talk with Jacqueline too. Lady Bengaria and her sister were going out driving, and when they left the saloon to get ready neither Sir Joscelyn nor his son was in the room, though Fredrick soon came back.

"That," said Helmstone, "is a portrait of Lady Adelgitha, isn't it?"

"Yes, but we do not like it."

"It is more like yourself, I think."

"Like me? We are not much alike." The girl was not a fisher for compliments, and did not add, "She is ten times better-looking than I am," though she thought it.

"The portrait," she said, "was painted before I was born. But my mother hardly looks ten years older, does she?"

"No."

"We are very unlike in tastes. She paints beautifully, and I can't paint at all. And she almost dislikes music."

"You love it?"

"Yes, I find I do. I didn't know till lately that I did. It was an unawakened sense."

He knew very well what had awakened it.

"What," he asked, still looking at the portrait, "did you think of Selvaggio's music?"

"I couldn't think—I felt it."

"And I could only think."

"You did not like it?"

"I have no taste. I cannot speak of the music. But I didn't like what he sang, so far as I could understand it."

"Perhaps you didn't understand it at all."

"Very likely. I am not clever."

"One is clever enough to know why one dislikes a thing? Why didn't you like what he sang?"

"Because it roughed me up. I am not in the faintest degree religious. But I leave it alone. It's a thing beyond my meddling. I'm as sure that there is real religion as I'm sure there is—algebra, or anything else I know nothing about."

"What he sang was not against religion."

"I thought it was."

("Because," thought Jacqueline, "you are stupid.") Aloud she said: "If you know nothing about religion you have hardly the right to say that your friend—he is your friend, is he not?—was using words against it."

She did not smile as she spoke, and her manner was cold and severe. He felt that she was not only snubbing him, but accusing him of disloyalty to his friend.

"As people go," he said quietly, "no doubt Selvaggio and I are friends. But he would be surprised if you hinted that he was bound to respect my tastes, and I can't see that I am bound to admire his."

"Were we talking of tastes? You accused him of singing words against religion. And immediately add that it is a subject of which you are ignorant."

"You asked me a question—why I disliked what he sang. I beg your pardon for having answered it."

"My pardon!"

"Yes. If you mean that it is his I should beg, I must say I do not think he would be very touchy on the subject. His views on religion, I fancy, are fairly easy-going. But you, I think, I have offended, and I wish that I had held my tongue."

At that moment Frederick came back.

"He has been treading on Jacqueline's toes," thought that sapient youth.

And Helmstone himself, when he bade her good-bye, was fully conscious of having got himself 'into her black books.'

"I am altogether out of her line," he thought, "and she rather dislikes me personally."

Upstairs Lady Adelgitha said a word or two about him to Miss Graystock, not at all in his disfavour.

"He is nice. You would never think he came out of his aunt's nest. Well bred, and wholesome. I don't think the other fellow is either."

"Count Selvaggio? I dare say you're right. But you've scarcely seen him. How sharp you are, Addy!"

"I saw him the day they called here after driving. Am I sharp? Perhaps it's because I am—how do you spell Madeira?"

"Madeira! M, A, D——"

"That's enough. Those are the letters."

PART III
ONE'S OWN WAY
CHAPTER XXVI

MISS GRAYSTOCK's house in London was in an unimpeachable situation—so had said the house-agent when he gave her the ticket to 'view' it. It was almost in Belgrave Square, so nearly that the house-agent declared it might be numbered 200A, Belgrave Square, without the possibility of any objection being raised. No 200 was a corner house, one side of which looked into the Square, and one side of which didn't. Opposite the side which didn't, in a short and narrow street which meant well, was a very high blank wall, and behind the wall were mews. Next to the blank wall came Miss Graystock's house, the roof of which was not quite so high as the wall. Next Miss Graystock's house was another, built slightly askew, as if it were ogling the square. That house was also small, and in it resided the Dowager Lady Tatters, of Tattershall in Cumberland. Her ladyship's neighbour on the other side was a wig-maker, though nobody any

longer wears a wig. Beyond the wig-maker came a music-shop, and beyond it a servants' registry-office, with an oval glass eye in the door on which, in gilt letters, was inscribed *Miss Job*, but whether the name were pronounced like the patriarch's or like the *bête noir* of the unemployed, there was nothing to inform the public. Miss Job had a habit of shaking a hearthrug, made of tags of different-coloured cloth, out of her parlour window at about the time she should have been washing herself of a morning, and apparently she never found time to make any further toilette, for she was uncommonly dirty, and her hair looked like the stuffing that one sees oozing out of second-hand chairs in the dismal brokers' shops on the wrong side of Waterloo Bridge.

Miss Job, however, did a thriving business, and was pretty well known to ancestral-looking butlers and dowager-looking housekeepers in the adjacent square. There was, attached to the business, a Miss Adalia Job, who did most of the work, but she was merely a niece, young and rather pretty, who washed herself, didn't feed the front of her gown with grains of rice out of curry, and was of no account.

Miss Graystock resisted the temptation of numbering her house 200A, Belgrave Square, and it remained No. 1, Belgrave Corner. Lady Tatters was No. 2. The music-shop, the wig-maker, and

Miss Job were merely odd numbers in Tuck Street, S.W., the even numbers were a chemist, a green-grocer, a haggard-looking public-house, and a Dutch bulb importer opposite.

No. 1, Belgrave Corner was very small, apart from the fact that it had no ground-floor. What should have been the dining-room belonged to Lady Tatters' house, and was her butler's pantry, so that Miss Graystock's visitors, waiting on her doorstep in inclement weather, and conscious of leisurely criticism on the part of Lady Tatter's butler, if they were fresh visitors, were apt to resent his inaction and wish he would come and open Miss Graystock's door. He, always knowing well that they *were* fresh visitors, and appreciating the situation, enjoyed himself on these occasions very much.

Miss Graystock dined in a kind of stand-back of the staircase, halfway up, towards the rear, which had once, I think, been the bathroom. It had a (wooden) porphyry pillar on one side towards the landing, and a red plush curtain, baronially looped, on the other, and at the other end a window of stained glass, so to speak, to impede the view into somebody else's backyard. It did not always impede the sounds of altercation between somebody else's cook and somebody else's kitchen-maid.

The drawing-room, five steps higher up, was Miss Graystock's *pièce de résistance*; if not large,

it was as large as it could possibly be, and occupied the whole first-floor. Two mirrors opposite each other made it seem, to the visitor, like several hundred drawing-rooms, in each of which Miss Graystock was holding out the hand of welcome.

But if Miss Graystock's house was small, she had made it comfortable. Nobody understood comfort better—even the comfort of other people. Even in choosing her residence she showed it, for though she might have found a larger house for less money in another quarter, her friends would have had farther to go in search of her, and in London one's friends do not like to go far.

She kept no man-servant, though she had tried a footman. But she found that footmen, if domestic, were disposed to flirt with the housemaid, and if undomestic to range late afield: so she declined (if declension it were) on a neat, and far more efficient, parlour-maid, who only flirted with the milkman, and that hurriedly.

Miss Graystock understood how to 'live well'—*i.e.*, how to order her dinner. At the tables of her friends she saw profusion without displeasure, at her own she aimed only at simple excellence. If, as often occurred, she received a present of game or venison, she would send all the venison, and all the game except a grouse or so, a partridge, or a pheasant, to her butcher, and was 'credited' therewith against cutlets or legs of mutton. But she was

good-natured, and would often reserve a pheasant or a partridge for some spinster, like herself, but poorer, with less remembering friends, and never say a word about it to anybody.

Perhaps Miss Graystock was a little worldly, but not in any cold-hearted, calculating, spiteful or ruthless fashion. She had never elbowed herself up to the injury of other people's ribs, she was not even ambitious. She had not tried to grow richer at the cost of anybody else, nor did she turn a cold shoulder to friends somewhat fallen in fortune. As to friends whose fortunes had prospered better than her own, she neither envied and decried them nor fawned on them. Her means were not large, but most of her acquaintance imagined them to be somewhat more ample than they were, because she was a good manager, and so spent what she had as to procure for herself pretty nearly all the comforts she desired: and perhaps because she neither bragged of her poverty or complained of it. Of an excellent family, she managed to live as, she thought, became an elderly lady pretty nearly related to its head. Of him she expected no more than an occasional invitation to Graystock Castle—and perhaps a haunch of venison or some game now and then.

She did not so calculate her expenditure as to leave nothing over for charities or for tips. In no big house where she stayed was she held to be

mean by the servants—in small houses she never did stay, and the Little Sisters of the Poor who called at her door always knew that she would see them, and would not send them away empty-handed.

Her inoffensive worldliness amounted to no more than a rather timorous unwillingness to exchange this present world for a better. That the world to come was very much better she did not in the least doubt, but being a woman of moderate aspirations, and without extravagant ideas of her own claims, she found the world she knew adapted to her tastes and equal to her merits. She was a humble creature in her way, and readily perceived that for such a one as her Cousin Berengaria a very different world was necessary—to meet her views and reward her deserts. I think if she could have arranged matters for herself she would have chosen a future not much unlike the present, but relieved of the police news, gross poverty, and the fore-shadow death.

In inviting Jacqueline to be her guest for two months, Miss Graystock had been actuated by pure good-nature, without in the least taking sides with that young lady against the ruling power of Boon Court. She was shrewd enough to know that, if there was between the girl and her aunt any real divergence of opinion, it was probably the former who was in the wrong. But she thought that things

down there had got themselves crooked, or were bending that way, without anyone's fault, and that it might be more comfortable for everyone if Jacqueline were to leave home for a while.

Miss Graystock was hardly a matchmaker, but it did occur to her that young women who live where it is almost impossible that they should meet young men of their own class are likely to remain unmarried. To be an old maid was, she thought, even less Jacqueline's vocation than to be a nun.

"Well, my dear," she remarked, as soon as they had changed their travelling-dresses and were seated in her drawing-room at tea, "here you are, and all I can say is that you are as welcome here as you could be anywhere. It's a crib of a house, and I don't object to big houses myself——"

"I think small ones much pleasanter," declared Jacqueline, looking approvingly around her.

"It's very nice of you to say so. I'm not wrapped up in small houses myself, as I said. But I can say that the chimneys don't smoke, you don't smell the kitchen; and when you ring for hot water you get it. At Graystock the hot water has to come so far that it's tepid before it gets to you."

"There! Cousin Amelia!"

"All the same, I wouldn't mind changing houses with Lionel Graystock. However, I doubt if he'll propose it, and meanwhile I live here, and my friends are kind enough to come here to see me."

"It is very kind of *you* to let me come."

"No, it isn't. Not a bit. When one is sixty-eight, eighteen is a pleasant neighbour. Your visit will be quite a spree for me. I shan't give a ball in your honour, but I shall have lots of people to dinner—in driblets. My dining-room will seat four—like the sofa in the saloon at Boon Court."

Jacqueline made a face (not a very ugly one).

"The saloon! It is awful!"

"Oh no! It isn't. A very fine room, and only fine things in it."

"I'm often in it, and I am certainly not fine."

"No, my dear, not fine in English, but *trés fine* in French, which is very different. I admit that the saloon at Boon Court is not modern; but the de Bohuns are not modern people. Your Aunt Berengaria doesn't set up for taste, but she has quite correct instincts, and every room in her house is the sort of thing that suits her, and her—what she is, stately, no doubt. But it isn't every house that *can* be stately, let it try ever so hard."

"I wish Boon Court wouldn't try."

"Ah! but it doesn't. That's the point. There's no trying for things there."

Jacqueline gave a little laugh.

"Frederick," said she, "has been trying a good deal of late to be my master."

"He's at a trying age."

Then they both laughed, aware that Miss Gray-

stock had made a little play with the word; and Jacqueline perceived that it was not to be counted to her for unrighteousness that she was not disposed to welcome management on the part of her brother.

"I think," she remarked later on, "that I would like very well to be like you——"

"An old maid!"

"That's a question of time. I'm not an old maid now, because I am young, but——"

"No; it's not a question of time at all. An old maid is a *thing*, and you're not *it*, and never will be. It will take you half a century to be my age; but at the end of the half century you wouldn't be an old maid."

"I shouldn't mind if I were. It must be very pleasant living in your own little house in London——"

"*You* would be able to live in a big one if you chose: two big ones—one big one up here, one big one down in the country."

"That doesn't sound so cheerful. I was going to say living in your own little house, like this, and doing just as you chose."

"Well, I confess I do pretty much what I choose, and I like my own way as well as most people. But I don't know that it's really so great an advantage as it looks. Too much choice is as bad as none at all. Married people get about as much as is good

for us, I expect; they divide it between them, and if they're reasonable folks, each gets enough, but not too much."

Jacqueline laughed and said:

"You ought to have married, Cousin Amelia."

"One ought to do what one can—not what one can't! There *was* a young man once, when I was a young woman. He wasn't altogether 'ineligible—goodish-looking (better than I was); a great deal richer than me; not a fool (though he did propose to me); nor disagreeable; nor ill-conducted; and of a very good family. He promised faithfully to make me happy, but I said No, and stuck to it: though he asked me again even after he had seen the Miss Blond that he *did* make happy. I gave them a dining-room clock, and very ugly it was; but I didn't choose it on purpose; it cost just what I wanted to spend, and looked as if it had cost more."

Here Miss Graystock paused, to count the stitches on her knitting-needle, and gave her head a shake or wag of reminiscence.

"It wasn't very romantic," she went on, looking up with a laugh. "I dare say you're wondering why I refused him? Well, I had only one reason, and it was that I didn't care sixpence for him."

Jacqueline laughed too, and Miss Graystock continued her confession.

"There was another young man—a very different

young man: handsome, ever so handsome, and pleasant. And manly—a little racketsy, I dare say; but I didn't mind that much. For him I could have cared more than sixpence. But you see I didn't marry him. Why, do you suppose?"

"You didn't approve of him? or someone made mischief?"

"Nothing of the sort. It was simpler than that—he never asked me! Now you know why I'm Miss Graystock."

CHAPTER XXVII

MISS GRAYSTOCK kept her word, and invited a succession of guests, some to dinner, some to luncheon, and many more to tea. And most of these *invités* made the retort courteous by inviting Miss Graystock and her young cousin, in some cases to dances, in others to dinner-parties (which for her own sake Miss Graystock much preferred), in others to evening parties, and in some cases to share their box at opera or theatre.

"I like the play," Miss Graystock confessed, "but I never did care much for opera. The singing ruins the acting, and I haven't faith enough to believe in it. In real life if we found a young man bellowing through a wood that he was horribly in love we should place him under restraint; and as for dying in a burst of song, even swans know

better, and the contrary is a human libel on them. I only go to the opera to see the people, and in that way it's amusing enough, though I would never pay a guinea or two out of my own pocket to look at anybody."

I said most of the *invités*, because Miss Graystock's guests were often people who could not afford to entertain; it was peculiarly her pleasure, small as her table was, to see at it some old friend to whom a nice dinner was by no means a matter of course. But if one of the two guests was an elderly lady, Amelia took care that the other should be a young man, though he was not always better company than the old maid or widow.

"My dear," said Miss Graystock one morning, coming in from a short walk, "I have just invited a young man to dinner whom you do not much affect. Romney Bruce *was* coming, but he telegraphed to say he was for Palace Guard to-night, and who should I meet outside the wig-maker's (he swore he hadn't been in, and hadn't been ordering a wig) but Lord Helmstone. He's rather a flame of mine, and I don't mind telling you because you don't like him. We talked away for ten minutes by the clock, and Miss Job watched us over her wire blind with a long smut on her nose. Then we talked for five minutes more on the doorstep here, and Lady Tatters's butler watched us while he shaved, and I'm afraid there'll be a scandal. But I'm like

Cæsar's wife, and don't care. He has been to Scotland (not Gretna Green, he insists), and I asked him to dine to-night, and he's coming. You can talk to Lady Caroline, who will amuse you with her reminiscences of a lady-in-waiting (especially if you haven't read it all in books, as, unfortunately, I have), and how many helpings of boiled pork Her Serene Highness used to take, and how many pills afterwards, and why the Princess always kept her blinds down on the third of August, and who Prince Adolf of Schwarzenkopffeln really is—no, I don't expect she will tell *you* that story. Really, she is quite interesting if you don't know her by heart; and she adored your grandfather, though he abhorred her. She was a pretty girl in her day, but it's awful to be the daughter of an Earl who has married three poor wives and had large families by each of them; she was about that old German Serenity for thirty-nine years, and only got seventy pounds a year for it, and the back seat in her brougham; and when Princess Augustina Wilhelmina died she left Caroline her Bible (which was as good as new) and her miniature set in Irish diamonds, out of compliment to her being one of Lord Fermanagh's eighteen daughters. It was rather a blow to poor Caroline, for the portrait *had* been set in real brilliants, but the old heathen had left *them* to his reigning Highness of Schwarzenkopffeln to be crown jewels."

Whether Miss Graystock thus rattled on to make as little as possible of the fact that she had invited Lord Helmstone to dinner, the astute reader must judge for herself. If so, she was not quite unsuccessful, for Jacqueline asked a few amused questions about Lady Caroline Salisbury, and hardly alluded to Lord Helmstone. The little dinner-party went off very well: the ex-lady-in-waiting told her stories to an excellent listener, and enjoyed her dinner and her glass or two of wine; and Lord Helmstone seemed content to talk chiefly to his hostess. But Jacqueline was neither surly nor ill-bred, and knew that in so small a party it behooved her not to give her attention exclusively to Lady Caroline. She had really no conscious objection to Lord Helmstone; it was merely that she did not care about young men in general. Here in London she found it easier to talk to him; down at Boon Court she would hardly have known how to find a subject. In the drawing-room after dinner she mentioned his friend, and that with all her own frank simplicity.

"Count Selvaggio is in London, isn't he?" she asked. I am nearly sure that I saw him at the opera one night——"

"Oh yes! As it happens, I met him to-day: five minutes after I had left Miss Graystock. We walked on together. And I told him I was dining here to-night. He said he was very busy. So far

as I can see he never does anything, but he always declares he is busy."

"And do you also profess to be full of affairs?"

"No. I never tell fibs. And no one would believe me if I did say I was busy."

"Well," said Miss Graystock, "I'm always busy, though I don't do anything in particular."

No more was said about Count Selvaggio at that moment, but Lady Caroline had caught the name and had been ruminating upon it. She believed herself to know the name of everyone in London, and could hardly let one pass.

"Selvaggio!" she observed in a subsequent pause. "I heard you mention a Count Selvaggio. And I'm sure I've heard the name before. Who is he?"

"I dare say," said Helmstone, "that you *have* heard it. He has been a good deal in London. I know him rather well, and Miss Graystock and Miss Joscelyn also know him a little."

"Where did you meet him, Amelia?" asked Lady Caroline.

"At Boon Court."

"At Boon Court! He was staying there?"

"No, Caroline. He was staying with Lady Louisa Raffham, Lord Helmstone's aunt, and they all dined at Boon Court."

"We met several times," said Jacqueline.

"Well, then, who is he? since you all know him."

"He is a friend of mine——" Lord Helmstone began.

"Then *you* can tell me. Italian, I suppose. Does he belong to the Embassy?"

"No. He is, I think, Sicilian. But he lives as much here as anywhere, at present. He is very clever, and he is rich enough to go where he likes, and do what he likes."

"But does anyone know anything about him?" persisted Lady Caroline.

And Jacqueline began to think she did not care much for the former lady-in-waiting.

"Except that he is a friend of mine, I can't tell you much," said Lord Helmstone, smiling, "and I don't suppose he could tell you much more about me if you were to ask him."

"Oh," said Lady Caroline, "everybody knows all about you. That's quite different."

"I'm afraid that's because there's so little to know;" and the young man laughed cheerfully.

Jacqueline was now quite sure that she thought Lady Caroline an inquisitive old busybody: but she was not cross with Lord Helmstone. He had, she thought, shown a manly determination not to gossip about his friend, or to satisfy the old woman's prying curiosity. He did in part deserve this good opinion, for though he really knew scarcely more about Selvaggio than he had said, he had heard vague and unsubstantial rumours.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN Lord Helmstone called at No. 1, Belgrave Corner after his little dinner-party there, he was told that Miss Graystock was at home, and shown up into her drawing-room, where he found Miss Joscelyn.

"My cousin," said she, giving him her hand with a cordial smile, "has gone to see some friends of hers in the Square, round the corner. But she will be back for tea, and so if you wait a few minutes you will see her."

The young man was quite willing to wait, and not, perhaps, specially impatient for the immediate return of his hostess.

"We met Count Selvaggio last night," Jacqueline told him presently, "at a big party at Princess Rauchenfels'. He sang again."

"That he always does well."

"Yes. But he also played the violin, and I think it was more wonderful even than his singing. You know, I am not musical: at least, I never thought I was till I heard him. Doesn't that show a strange power in him—to awake a new sense in one?"

"He couldn't awake it if it wasn't there," said Helmstone, smiling; "you can't awake a man who doesn't exist."

"But if he has always been asleep, you make him a present of his existence by rousing him. Lady

Caroline Salisbury was there too, and I saw her asking everybody questions as to your friend. She did not get much out of you here, the other night."

"I had very little to tell."

He paused a moment, and added:

"Men, I suppose, are not so much interested in each other as——"

"Old ladies, like Lady Caroline, are."

"Exactly. In a fashion, we have known each other rather well for some time. But I don't know anything about his affairs, and I do not see that they concern me."

"Of course not. I was glad to see how little that prying old woman got out of you."

"There was nothing to get."

Again he paused, and then said:

"Even if *you* asked me, I could not say much more."

"I am not at all given to asking inquisitive questions."

"No. I am sure of that. But the cases would be different. I brought him to your house——"

"No, Lord Helmstone. My aunt asked him to *her* house."

"Because he was my aunt's guest. And so I was responsible for him. If, out of his coming, any intimacy with any of you were likely to follow, and any of you were to ask me what I knew of him, I should still have to say 'Almost nothing.'"

Though he perceived that the cordiality of his reception was cooled, he persisted in saying this, because he felt himself obliged to say it. Jacqueline was quite alive to the fact that he was not the nonentity she had at first thought him; but she was now angry with him.

"You have delivered your soul," she said, smiling; but there was no friendliness in the smile.

And when Miss Graystock came in she at once noted that the young man had lost ground again since his last visit. He did not stay long, and when he said good-bye she thought he seemed almost sad.

"He is the handsomest man I ever met," she said, when he was gone, "who didn't seem to have the least consciousness of it."

"I saw his portrait before I ever saw him, and I remember thinking it the most beautiful face of a man I had ever seen in real life or in a picture. I think you are right as to his never giving a thought to his own appearance. In that way he is certainly manly."

"I should say he was altogether manly. Not a genius, of course."

"Far from being a genius. But not silly."

"You are praising him too much," said the shrewd old woman, laughing. "That's a bad sign. He is not in your good books."

"No. I do not think it manly to speak against the absent.

"I can't imagine his doing that."

"He has been warning me against his friend."

"Warning you?"

"Saying that he knows nothing about Count Selvaggio."

"Well, no one does know anything about him. It doesn't matter in the case of a man who has so little to do with us. People gossip, of course. I'm sure Lord Helmstone did not do that about him."

"No. He didn't even hint, not remotely, that there *was* gossip."

"There is, though."

Jacqueline, whose faults were neither stupidity nor ungenerosity, at once felt more kindly disposed to Helmstone. She resented any sort of warning, but she could see that he had been wholly above justifying his warning by repeating rumours in confirmation of it.

Miss Graystock thought she realized the situation, and that the girl would be much more likely to be interested in Selvaggio if she imagined herself warned off him, or if she perceived any special pains taken to prevent her meeting him.

"She is," the old woman told herself, "wayward, and not very wise. Your clever creatures seldom are. And she is quixotic: sure to champion anyone whom she thinks opposed out of

prejudice—being a bundle of prejudices herself. Her whole attitude to Helmstone is prejudice.”

CHAPTER XXIX

As it happened, Jacqueline met Count Selvaggio on several occasions of which Miss Graystock was not aware. On the first and the second of these occasions the meeting was purely accidental. The first fell out in this wise:

Miss Graystock's cousins 'in the Square' (she had many there, but these were her intimate friends) were Lord and Lady Waldo Bigod, and her ladyship was, or imagined herself to be, extremely musical. Being now, in fact, a little deaf, she was peculiarly assiduous in attending concerts with more energy than ever. Her daughter, Miss Angela Bigod, was also devoted to music and not at all deaf.

“We have,” said Angela, coming round to Miss Graystock's one morning, “three tickets for Isaye's recital this afternoon. Papa won't come at any price. Would Jacqueline go?”

At the concert Lady Waldo sat between the two girls; a few minutes before the music began Count Selvaggio came in and took the seat next to Jacqueline. Of course they spoke to each other, and during the brief intervals of the performance they again talked a little.

"What do you think of him?" Selvaggio asked the girl.

"I don't know enough about it to think. I am quite ignorant of music. He is beyond me. Too perfect, I expect. And the sort of things he chooses are too fine (I suppose) for me. They tell me nothing except that he can do what he chooses with his violin."

Selvaggio saw that she was, in fact, quite unmoved.

"Perhaps you do not care for the violin?"

"I didn't think I did care till I heard you the other night."

"I wasn't too perfect for you," suggested Selvaggio, laughing.

"No. Or else what you played was easier——"

"It was much easier than what he has just played."

"I meant easier for me to understand. It conveyed something: perhaps only an emotion, but I think something ethical."

"May I ask what?"

"I don't think I can tell you quite clearly. It was very light and very pathetic: one thought of dancing, elfish feet, and of pain to which they were dancing gaily down. I had a picture—of very young feet dancing, and faces among flowers; and the feet bled, and the flowers had bitter thorns. And there was brilliant light in the picture, and

warmth; and a shadow, like death, in the light; and an intolerable threat of ice in the warmth."

"What I played is called *A Parable*, and you at least read it. It might as well be called *The Question*. There is an answer, but that cannot express itself even in music."

"Who composed it?"

"No one. It was an impromptu. I played it because I saw you there. If we ever know each other well, I will tell you the answer."

Isaye was just beginning again, and Selvaggio paused an instant, then added, as the first sound of the violin made reply from her impossible.

"But we are never to know each other well. That is the decree."

He was really attracted by her. For many reasons it would suit him well to marry her, if it could be managed; but he was beginning to desire to marry her chiefly, and not in the second place, for herself. He was sure she would worship him, and he would like that. He did not at all despise her for being ready, or nearly ready, as he thought, to worship him. He did not think it a proof of her foolishness, but of her fine appreciation. She saw in him what others did not, and that he set down as a gift or cleverness in her. It showed her clarity of vision. All the best sort of women, he thought, worshipped some man. That he believed was their peculiar function. Of course, what they

worshipped was an ideal, not a fact; but he liked the thought of being this girl's ideal. He assured himself that it was a part of his own cleverness not to put her down as a mere simpleton, or raw, or fancy-blind. Very young and untaught she was, of course, and wayward enough; but not vain, or of a poor spirit. And then she was high-bred: her loveliness had extreme distinction. Her eyes had almost the exquisite pathos of a child's, and yet her whole face, and every pose of her delicate head and neck, had dignity.

During the next short interval Jacqueline was talking to Lady Waldo, and she and Selvaggio said nothing to each other. Later on he asked her:

"Do you also profess to know nothing of painting?"

"I do know nothing of it."

"I think I get more pleasure out of pictures than out of music, though I can't paint: perhaps *because* I can't. I play, and am worried because what I play is never what I mean—only an attempt at expression: as if one should be using a language only half known, and obliged to say, not what one desired, but what one could. I do not even try to paint, so I am free simply to understand and rejoice in what others say in that language. Perhaps colour and form are a clearer language than wordless sound."

"I should think pictures must be easier to under-

stand. They generally are images of things, and I suppose music is an echo of emotions."

"Jacqueline," Lady Waldo said in her ear, "introduce Count Selvaggio."

She had heard of his proficiency in music, and had been pondering a scheme for getting him to play and sing at one of her private concerts.

The introduction was made, and from it resulted a good many meetings between Jacqueline and Selvaggio at Lady Waldo's house. On the present occasion, however, it put an end to their private conversation with each other, except that before the end of the concert he asked her if she ever went to any of the great public galleries.

"I have hardly been to any of them."

He mentioned several, and advised her to go; especially he recommended one.

"The morning," he explained, "is the best time. There are fewer people, and one can see the pictures better."

On the following morning he himself went to that gallery, but he did not see Jacqueline. Next day he repeated the visit, again unsuccessfully. But her not coming did not discourage him, or cause him pique. He only became more eager, and found himself now continually thinking of her—really of her: originally he had largely considered and weighed her as possibly, but not certainly, likely to fit into his life, which was devoted to a definite ob-

ject. He had even been anxious to arrive at the conclusion that she would fit into that life, because in other matters she supplied what he desired—high rank and birth, beauty, distinction, and wealth. Now he found that it was not necessary to decide that she would fit into that life: it could be kept apart, and his life with her would be a separate thing—a repose from it. And, seeing that that other life, in which he was more and more coming to resolve that she should never have any part, was one of incessant tension, he began to look forward to such intermission and rest from it with a peculiar sense of relief. Was not this a tribute to the girl?

CHAPTER XXX

SELVAGGIO continued to pay morning visits to the picture-gallery he had recommended, feeling sure that sooner or later Jacqueline would go thither; and he was not mistaken.

He had suggested it because it was in the part of London where she was staying, and yet its situation was quiet and little frequented by Belgravians.

About a week after he had mentioned it to her he found her there.

"I have been here nearly an hour," she told him.

"Well, and what is your impression?"

"I haven't any—in particular. The landscapes

are pretty, especially the wan snowy ones, with desolate sheep in them—but——”

“Do you find the Constable landscapes only pretty? However, it doesn't matter much: the finest, even of them, is only a landscape. How about *that?*”

And he pointed to a large subject-piece. It showed a jocund pageant of lordling cavaliers and laughing demoiselles, meant somewhat obviously and yet not very convincingly to figure the Pride of Life; disregarding, they ride by a Calvary, and under it the legend, ‘Is it nothing to you, all ye that go by?’

Jacqueline scanned it carefully, and he said:

“Well?”

“If you want me to find it great, I cannot,” she answered.

“I did not. That is worse than pretty. Even the cheap moral it has would not be clear without the label. It is a costume-study with a name. . . . Come and look at this.

The picture showed a rampart-wall, and beyond it, far beneath it, a stretch of summer sea exquisitely clean and living, wholesome and glad. The impression of light, free air and sun was irresistible. Against the rampart-wall, staring over it, sat a monster, a man bull-headed, at wicked odds with Nature, the whole expression of the figure hateful, inhuman, yet human enough to be a curse and libel

on humanity: malign, shocking, inherently cruel, and yet tragic, because the monster was himself a victim, being what he was, not by choice, but by foul fate.

"I am glad I didn't see that before," Jacqueline almost whispered. And she turned away with profound repulsion. Selvaggio took it that, alone, the picture would have frightened her.

They both turned from the Minotaur, and, turning, saw her brother Frederick coming across the room to them. His air was somewhat judicial, and his step was firm and important.

He raised his hat, and smiled tightly, saying:

"Good-morning, Count Selvaggio. Good-morning, Jacqueline. I have just come up, for the day, from Boon; as I came out of Victoria Station I caught sight of you, in the distance, coming this way, and I followed you. But you walked so quickly I could not overtake you. Is the Count giving you a lesson in art?"

He had seen what picture they were studying, and he glanced at it with very stiff disapproval. He knew all about the Minotaur, and was angry with Selvaggio for showing it to his sister: in any case, he would have been angry with *her* for being with the man, and alone with him.

"How," asked Jacqueline, "are they all at Boon?"

"Oh, quite well. . . . Shall you be stopping long in this place? Isn't it nearly luncheon time?"

"Cousin Amelia doesn't lunch till half-past one. It isn't half-past twelve yet. . . ."

"Yes, it is nearly quarter to one. . . ."

"Count Selvaggio," said Jacqueline, turning to him with a smile, "our study of the picture must wait for another occasion. My brother's journey has evidently made him hungry. I am sure Miss Graystock would be delighted if you would walk home with us and have luncheon with her."

She had never before taken upon herself to invite any guest to her cousin's table, and Selvaggio understood very well that she only did it now to show her brother that she was not suffering from any guilty sense of being detected in misdoing. Selvaggio was not really engaged, but, admiring her for her courage and spirit, he would not take advantage of it.

"Miss Graystock," he said, "is always most kind. But, alas! I cannot accept your tempting invitation on her behalf. I am lunching with a friend—and by-the-by, his hour is one, so I must leave you to your brother's care."

"I shall, however, see you to-night. You are singing and playing at Lady Waldo's concert."

She and Selvaggio shook hands: Frederick was 'standing off,' so to speak, and to him the Count only raised his hat.

The brother and sister walked to Belgrave Corner, and on the way Frederick tried to deliver a lecture.

"Your acquaintance with that foreigner seems to have developed since you came up here," he observed sardonically.

"We have met several times. Though he is a foreigner, he has a name: if you want to discuss him you might as well call him by it."

"I spoke of him as I did to mark that I do not consider him as belonging to our world."

"'Our world'!"

"The society to which we belong."

"If he didn't belong to the society we belong to I should not have been meeting him."

"Apparently you meet him in public galleries."

"To-day I met him there. Our other meetings have been in the houses to which Cousin Amelia takes me. Oh—I forgot: we met once at a concert-hall."

"By accident—like this morning—of course," remarked Frederick with elaborate sarcasm.

"It was certainly an accident that we met at the concert. As for this morning, I wasn't quite surprised to see him there.

"I dare say not."

"No. He recommended that gallery, and I went, and it didn't surprise me that he was also there."

"How long had you been there when I cropped up?"

"About an hour." She did not explain that Selvaggio had not been there with her for much more than five minutes.

"Jacqueline, you must see for yourself that a girl in your position should not be meeting, almost by appointment, a man like Selvaggio in—picture-galleries."

"What I see for myself I shall probably keep to myself. What is my position?"

Frederick gave an exclamation of impatience and said:

"If papa and Aunt Berengaria knew that you so employed your time in London, they would certainly insist on your return to Boon."

"Of course they will know—and of course papa will do whatever Aunt Berengaria tells him."

When she said, "Of course they will know," Frederick reddened.

"You seem," he complained fretfully, "determined to get into mischief lately—first the convent escapade——"

It was *her* turn to flush now, and she said:

"That 'escapade,' as you call it, is over and done with, anyway."

"Its results are not. Since you came back you have been—all over the place. The Wildspur in-

timacy, and now this one, which I suppose is part of it."

"I really don't know," she answered simply, "whether I am intimate with Count Selvaggio or not. I am more interested in his talk than in any one else's whom I meet——"

"There! And his talk is not good for you, not fit for you."

"Not fit for me! Why, you never heard him talk to me!"

"I know the sort of man" (and Frederick looked world-wise and *experimenté*).

Jacqueline softly laughed.

"He is a man," declared Frederick solemnly, "without faith——"

"'Faith!' Oh, Freddy! when you meet young ladies in society ('in our world'), do you regale them with professions of faith? I must say I'm glad we shall not be called upon to dance together. . . . Here is Cousin Amelia: if I were you I shouldn't treat her to a talk about faith."

CHAPTER XXXI

JACQUELINE, though common sense may not have been her richest endowment, was not quite so silly as to fall in love with a man merely because her brother was evidently in deadly fear lest she should. But his interference certainly did not have the effect

of making her anxious to avoid Selvaggio, or convince her that it was any part of her duty to cut that gentleman's acquaintance.

That he would make a report to their father and Lady Berengaria she took for granted, and in that she did him no injustice, though perhaps it was hardly fair to describe the process in her own mind as telling tales. Frederick's diplomacy did not even secure the allegiance of Miss Graystock.

"Cousin Amelia," he began (and the old lady quite consciously adverted to the fact that there was no relationship whatever between her and either of Frederick's parents)—"Cousin Amelia, I know how kind an interest you take in Jacqueline. . . ."

That young lady had gone upstairs to put on her hat, and they had the drawing-room to themselves.

"Bless us!" thought Miss Graystock; "how solemn we are! What a prig it is! I never could stand the father, who's like a well-bred chemist. But the son's worse."

Then aloud:

"We're great chums, and her visit has taken ten years off my age."

"It was ever so kind of you to ask her. I only hope she won't make you (or any of us) regret your kindness."

Then he told his tale. But Miss Graystock, perhaps because he told it, refused altogether to be impressed.

"Meet him!" she said. "Of course we meet him. He goes to houses where we go. As for the picture-gallery, I warrant it was pure chance."

"She doesn't even pretend it was pure chance——"

"Pretend! Your sister is quite incapable of pretending anything——"

The old lady was not at all pleased, but her displeasure was with Jacqueline's brother rather than with Jacqueline. She perceived that he was disparaging her efficiency and alertness as a chaperon, and she was not disposed to accept instruction from a youth of his time of life, nor to regard the girl who was her guest as a sort of state-prisoner.

"If," she said in conclusion of the conversation, "your father or Lady Berengaria send me word that Jacqueline's visit here is to be shorter than I had hoped, I shall be very sorry. But, till they do, I hope she will enjoy herself. Boon isn't a very lively place for a girl."

"It is the same for her as for all of us—our home."

"No, Mr. Frederick, it isn't the same for you all. You have been away from it for most part of every year since you were a little boy and went to school—then you went to college. . . ."

"Oxford," suggested Frederick.

"Oh! I thought Oxford was college."

"A University." (Oh, foolish youth to correct

an old lady to whom correction was unpleasant.)

"Well; you went to a University, and your vacations were often spent abroad with a tutor, or a party of friends. That is very different from Boon, and nothing but Boon, all the year round. You go and stay with school and coll—University friends: she has had no schoolfellows to ask her——"

The door opened and Jacqueline came in.

"I have," declared her hostess, "been telling your brother how you have livened me up."

But his sister perceived clearly that he had been undergoing treatment, and was at no loss to understand how he had brought it on himself. However indifferent we may be to having tales told of ourselves, it seldom endears the teller to us, and Jacqueline was not much disposed to pity Frederick for having met with a snub, nor to submit herself the more to his guidance. That they were now about to spend the afternoon together hardly seemed to promise her unmixed pleasure, for she misdoubted his intentions and foresaw further homilies; but she had stiffened her back for resistance, and was at any rate without apprehension. She intended neither to quarrel nor to succumb.

Within a few minutes of her reappearance Lord Helmstone was announced, and he began with an apology for so early a visit, which he explained by saying that a friend had handed over to him a box at the Cadogan Theatre for that afternoon's mati-

née. Would Miss Graystock and her guests care to make use of it?

"It is a variety show," he added, "and we should only miss the early 'turns': the *révue* won't be on for a long time yet."

Miss Graystock was not going out, and had asked a friend to come and see her and stay on to tea. But she accepted for Jacqueline and Frederick on condition that Lord Helmstone accompanied them. She privately thought the escape from a *tête-à-tête* with her brother would be a blessing for Jacqueline.

So the three young people went off together, and Jacqueline, who was quite of her cousin's opinion as to the *tête-à-tête*, was correspondingly grateful and gracious to Helmstone.

Frederick was a little puzzled. Was his sister, after all, playing coquette, with two strings to her bow? Such injurious suspicion showed how very little he really knew her; but he did not himself think the worse of her for it—so long as the string to be finally pulled should be Lord Helmstone. He was too obtusely self-satisfied to know that Lord Helmstone was far from admiring Miss Joscelyn's brother, and had therefore no prejudice against him on that account. Helmstone was his own cousin, but not his sister's, and he was a Viscount and would be an Earl; and Frederick liked the idea of the bet-

tering of the Cruickshanks blood by alliance with the de Bohun.

Helmstone seemed diffident, almost shy, but grew less so as Jacqueline's cordiality continued and the afternoon progressed. Frederick was not deceived in his conclusion that his cousin seriously admired his sister. Did she really like him? At times he thought so; at all events, she talked a great deal more to him than she would have done had Frederick himself not been there.

To the earlier 'turns' Frederick accorded a sort of elderly-gentleman, tolerant patronage: they were very well—quite harmless and unobjectionable. He smiled, and even, once or twice, patted his programme with a couple of fingers to encourage the performers. In doing so he would glance at his companions almost as who should say: "It is *their* idea of pleasure. I am here for their sakes." On such occasions he looked about forty-five.

"Of course," he observed in mild protest, "it serves no *purpose*."

"Amusement?" suggested Helmstone.

"The question is," counter-questioned the youthful sage, "is amusement our special need? Are our lives so strenuous——"

"You and I and your sister," interrupted Helmstone, "are not the only people in the theatre."

He could say no more, for a girl was beginning to sing.

The words were as slight as they were few:

"Two faces turn'd to thee,
Silver-cargoed moon,
(His and mine) in rhapsody
That night in June.
All his heart he'd given me,
Ask'd for mine soon.

"Two faces turn'd to thee
To-night, wintry moon.
White as thine,
His and mine;
Mine with the blanch of agony,
His with the white of Eternity—
Call, call me soon."

But the voice that carried the words was splendid—more than splendid, for it was vibrant with sympathy and pathos; and the musical setting deserved far finer lyrics to express its depth and beauty.

Jacqueline listened absorbed, and with a tense response to the singer's appeal that somehow touched Helmstone and seemed to him itself pathetic. He did not despise her because her nature was a tangle of emotions, but rather felt a reverence for what seemed to him a part of her inviolate youth and real simplicity.

The song's close brought from all the house a storm of applause, continued till the singer sang again. No doubt she was used to it and expected it, and perhaps that was why she gave a much finer

song now than her former one. It was the 'Indian' lyric, 'Less than the dust beneath thy chariot wheel,' and in it she reached a far higher pitch of tenderness and abject pathos.

This time Jacqueline's applause was rendered by no hand-clapping." Helmstone saw her draw one long finger-tip across each eye. The neighbourhood of emotion either breeds it or irritates. Frederick it annoyed. To him it seemed a *manque* of dignity and reticence in a young lady of rank in a public place—though, in fact, none but he and Helmstone noted it, and many other eyelashes were wet.

"It is not the song or the music," he declared, "that makes them cry. They do it because the singer is famous, and these two songs are her *pièces de résistance*."

"Which no one," suggested Helmstone, "can resist."

The *révue* which followed was chiefly spectacular, amazingly pretty, but without much 'to it,' as Americans say.

"It is very light," observed Frederick judicially. "Attractive and harmless—entirely harmless; but very light."

"*Hamlet* or *King Lear*," Helmstone remarked mildly, "are seldom acted in *révue*."

Perhaps he was a little nettled, as one in place of host often is (though, of course, the host is not

responsible for the entertainment), by disparagement of the performance to which he has brought friends.

Jacqueline found that, on the whole, she liked Lord Helmstone better than she had thought, and she was disposed to think him less of a nonentity.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Frederick returned to Boon Court he found his stepmother and her sister together in the drawing-room. Sir Jeremy, who liked a cigar after dinner, was reported to be writing letters in his study.

Lady Adelgitha was, or allowed herself to seem to be, indulging in a doze. Lady Berengaria was knitting a jersey for some poor child.

"Did you dine in the train?" she inquired. "I told them to have some dinner ready in case you didn't."

"No. I had tea late at Cousin Amelia's—and wasn't hungry. Jacqueline and I had been to a sort of *matinée* with my cousin Helmstone. He improves, I think, on acquaintance."

"Yes, I should say he would. He is a quiet young man, and certainly well bred. How did you find Amelia and Jacqueline?"

"Oh, very well——"

"I hope Jacqueline is enjoying herself."

"Certainly she is enjoying herself. But, Aunt Berengaria . . ."

"What, dear?"

"I'm not so sure she is behaving exactly as you would wish. I never took to that Count Selvaggio."

"No; I saw that. Nor did I."

"Well, she seems to me to be seeing more of him than there is the least necessity for. I hinted as much to Cousin Amelia, but she shut me up."

Lady Berengaria counted stitches, and said nothing for a moment. Lady Adelgitha out of nearly closed eyes surveyed them both.

"I have never discovered," observed Frederick, "whether the fellow is even a Catholic."

"That is rather the way with many of the Continental Catholics," said Lady Berengaria—"they don't show what they are."

No one was stronger on the universality of the Catholic Church than Lady Berengaria, but in her heart she thought that there were no Catholics like her own countrymen. You could tell them to be Catholics almost at sight. Latin Catholics had not the same *cachet*.

"One knows nothing about this Selvaggio," Frederick continued. "Even Helmstone, who brought him down to Lady Louisa's, seems to know really nothing about him. Of course, it

wouldn't matter to us if—if there were no intimacy between him and Jacqueline."

"Are they intimate up in London?" asked Lady Berengaria, with sinking heart.

"Yes, I think so. It seems to me that they are."

Then Frederick told his tale, without exaggeration, but with some colouring of prejudice. He had barely finished when a footman announced that his dinner was ready for him, and he went away to it.

Lady Berengaria knitted on, but the door had scarcely closed behind Frederick when her sister spoke.

"I can't congratulate you," she remarked with perfect detachment, "on either of your young people. The adopted nephew is a tell-tale Tit—

"Tell-tale Tit,
His tongue should be slit"

—and his pretty sister is evidently misbehaving herself. If I were you I should get rid of them all. Why shouldn't Sir Jeremy Diddler set up a house for them? He has money enough, hasn't he?"

"Yes, dear; he has money enough. But please don't speak like that. This is their *home*; he is my brother."

"Now, Berengaria! That is absurd. There

never was a Sir Jeremy de Bohun, and he would have to be that to be your brother. He would be *my* brother too; but—no thank you, my dear!”

Though for years her sister had often had to hear talk like this, it did not hurt her the less; but argument and explanation were useless and hopeless. Who had made Sir Jeremy her brother? That question she would never ask herself. A narrow woman, perhaps, in some ways, but there never was a better. Loyal to both—to the sister who had given her this brother and to him—she would ever be.

“Why don’t you fetch the girl home—if she can’t behave herself in London?” continued Addy. “But I suppose she would only start a flirtation with some other undesirable down here.”

“No, Addy, no. Jacqueline is not like that. She is not a flirt.”

“She seems to be flirting with this Arpeggio fellow up in town.”

“No, Addy. . . .”

“Then the brother is telling stories.”

“He never does that. . . .”

“Only tales,” suggested his mother coolly.

Berengaria only shook her head.

“Come,” said Adelgitha, “you were upset by what he told you. I could see that. So you evidently think she *is* flirting with Selvaggio.”

“Not flirting, Addy” (the very word was so

hateful to Berengaria that she could hardly bring herself to use it), "but I fear—I fear that he may be interesting to her, and that he is purposely making himself interesting."

"And you disapprove of him."

"We know nothing about him. He is a foreigner—we don't even know his nationality. We know nothing of his character, nothing of his way of life. I confess I do not like him."

"It is clear that the girl is behaving badly. Why doesn't her father stop her? It's *his* affair, after all."

And suddenly Lady Adelgitha yawned portentously, as if in dismissal of the subject.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AT that moment Jacqueline was listening with much more than all her ears to Selvaggio singing. All his hearers recognized that it was a fine performance; but to Jacqueline it was not a performance at all—it was a translation from the flatness of mere social life to a higher plane, a sphere above the earth, where winds of emotion breathed where they listed, whereof she knew neither whence they came nor whither they were bent. But she knew that they were better than talk, and said everlasting things. Exactly what they said she was not at pains to be aware. Only to listen to them for a

few minutes seemed to her more real and full life than a whole day of the common occupations that ordinary life brought to her. As it happened, no other singer at Lady Waldo's concert produced any such effect upon her. Some were very superb, but their melodies were no more than melody—sinking no deeper than her ears.

The concert was divided into two parts by an interval of nearly an hour, during which there was a sort of supper in the garden behind Lady Waldo's house. After the interval some of the guests went away, going on to some ball, as was said in excuse for their departure. The less musical guests perhaps enjoyed the interval as well as the concert which it cut in two. There were little tables set about in the garden, lighted only by 'fairy lights,' and here and there were chairs for those who had supped, or did not wish to sup. The interval had been intended by Lady Waldo to last about half an hour; in fact, it lasted over an hour. She did not greatly resent this, as her object was, of course, to gratify her guests, and it happened that during that hour her own daughter came to a satisfactory understanding with Doddy Soames of the Guards, Lady Solway's brother and heir-presumptive.

During part of the interval Jacqueline was supping with Lord Helmstone at one of the little tables, but during the latter half of it she was talking to Selvaggio and listening to him talk.

"Your brother," he observed carelessly, "isn't here?"

"Oh no. He only came up for the day."

"He complained to Helmstone of my meeting you at the gallery, and seems to have hinted that Helmstone should give me a wiggling."

This version of what Frederick had made an opportunity to say to Helmstone was not quite accurate, nor was it very inaccurate. In form Frederick's remark had not been exactly a complaint, but it had almost had the force of one; and, though he had given his cousin no commission to repeat his observations to Selvaggio, he had plainly hoped that Helmstone would do something or other. What I suspect Helmstone was too modest to understand was that Frederick really wanted to warn him of a rival, and put him the more on his mettle. To the sapient youth this seemed diplomacy—and indeed some diplomacy is not much more expert.

When Jacqueline heard this she flushed with anger; and, unreasonably enough, her annoyance was as much with the innocent Helmstone as with the guilty Frederick. She was used to her brother's interference, though not reconciled to it; it irritated her intensely that Helmstone should be brought in any degree into her private affairs, and that irritation fell on him, though she might have known he had in no way invited Frederick's impertinent confidences about her. Selvaggio did not

tell her that Helmstone had vigorously snubbed her brother, and had said to Selvaggio himself what an insufferable young prig his cousin was. She took it for granted that Helmstone had to some extent undertaken Frederick's commission.

Selvaggio watched her face and understood that her feelings were exactly those he had meant to suggest.

But when she spoke she did not allow her annoyance to betray itself in her words or voice.

"My brother," she said, smiling, "is a goose. He likes management, and at home he doesn't have much scope. Our aunt does all the managing, but so gently that we none of us feel it. She just has the trouble of turning the handle and the machine moves without grinding. I'm afraid Freddy will never have her delicacy of touch."

Selvaggio laughed, and she added:

"Besides he's in training for an Ambassador, and he thinks diplomacy doesn't mean minding one's own business."

"Well, he's right in that. It mostly consists in minding other people's."

Selvaggio admired her all the more for her way of taking the affair. He saw she was on his side, but she expressed no anger, whatever she may have felt, and had she done so he would have thought her less dignified.

"I told you," he remarked, quite lightly, and

again smiling, "that we were not to be friends. It is decreed—by Fate, and your brother."

He watched her very narrowly as he said this.

"My brother's decrees," she replied carelessly, "only bind himself."

"And Fate's?"

"Fate has no confidantes. One only discovers her decrees afterwards."

Here again he admired her. Had she protested that neither Fate nor brother should arrange her friendships for her, he might have been pleased, but he would have half-despised her; and the exquisite pleasure of pursuit would have been curtailed. He was an artist in pleasures and did not, for any gain, want to have them spoiled or squandered.

"I had," he observed, after a pause, "only one real listener to-night. And you used to pretend you were not musical!"

"It would have been pretence had I said I was. I know nothing of music."

"Yet it moves you as few are moved."

"Emotion is not knowledge."

"Much better than knowledge. Knowledge is experience, personal or second-hand—generally second-hand. Emotion is the divining of things unseen, unheard, higher than anyone's experience."

"Non-existent then."

"Oh, no. But unattained."

"What no one has attained yet is unattainable. It would be a queer conceit to think oneself the first destined to attain what no one from Eternity had reached."

"Emotion isn't thinking this or that, but response to a call beyond thought. The highest call of all is to the unattained—to what has always been promised never reached: even the Saints lived in submission to that summons: Perfection was their elusive Mistress. That made the difference between them and good folks."

His word 'even' caught her ear, and she echoed it.

"So even the Saints interest you," she said, with a surprise that flattered him—it was a tribute to his universality.

"All great facts must interest one," he replied quietly. "One of Time's greatest facts is the perennial existence of Saints in a world alien to them. It is the great Pathos. The most heroic, most valiant Forlorn Hope."

The generous humility of the tribute filled her ears, so that there was no room in them to hear the core of pessimism they held.

"You spoke of Perfection as the Saints' elusive mistress," she reminded him. "Wasn't, isn't, their one object God?"

"God and themselves. The absolute union of both. Heaven is the object of the really, though

ordinarily, good. The Saints have something more for object. Not only to achieve salvation, but to reach it by a higher path. The Saints know (for real Saints are of widest charity) that millions are saved by much easier and lower paths. But such paths would not suffice *them*. God is attainable, absolute Perfection isn't, yet the pursuit of it must be their life-work. No Saint dying thinks he has attained it, and the hour has struck; he has known all along it would be so, yet all along he has turned to that quest, and foregone all lesser; that is what I meant by the Great Pathos."

"You mean a glorious delusion—like the ensign's, who with twenty men dies to storm an impregnable fort?"

"It is not delusion to follow a voice that calls. For the voice is real. To attempt the impossible is possible to the noble. Must He not have known its 'impossibility' who said 'Be you perfect as My Father is perfect'? Yet He could not lie. He could not set men on a futile quest. Of ineffable cruelty how could Divine tenderness be capable? The quest at least must be real, possible. And the quest itself has deified many men."

Was Selvaggio simply insincere in saying all this? I think he had too much of the real artist's temperament for that, for though your artist's achievement be all a fiction, whether of words, of colours, or of sounds, he must be sincere in it, or it falls

short of art. Even the stage Lear, if he be a real actor, is a real King, homeless and broken, and childless in the storm, while his hour lasts. No doubt Selvaggio was now aware that the wand of emotions with which he could strike at the heart of this girl must be weighted with something beyond mere sensuous feeling of beauty, that he must make emotion itself put on a nobler guise, or disguise, before Jacqueline could quite admit its stroke. And he saw that, though he was himself pagan, she, over-glutted as she for the moment was with Christian food, ill-swallowed and not assimilated, was still Christian. Nevertheless, pagan as he was, through pagan living, and by revolt against the austere claims of Christianity, which he decided to regard as Medieval fetters, he was too appreciative to be blind to the nobility of the extremist Christian ideal—just as a Post-Impressionist, if he be an artist at all, can realize the beauty of Angelico or Pinturicchio, though it seems to him infant beauty, obsolete and pedestrian. He had not the slightest inclination or intention to obey the call of Perfection himself; self-sacrifice he thought a sublime folly, but he could see that it was fine—in a sphere outside economy and sanity.

Satisfied as he was with the success of his words, he might have thought twice before speaking them had he known that Jacqueline, listening, said to herself: "To that forlorn hope, perhaps I was called

too, only I turned and fled disillusioned and cowardly."

CHAPTER XXXIV

ABOUT a week after Frederick's visit to his sister and her hostess, Jacqueline received a note from her father asking if she would come down to Boon Court for two nights to keep his birthday at home. As it happened she had never been away on his birthday, and at once, without suspicion of any *arrière pensée* in the invitation, she wrote to say that she would go.

"I shall go down on Wednesday," she told Miss Graystock, "and come back—if you'll have me back—on Friday."

"Mind you do come back. Don't let them keep you. I shan't let you take away your luggage, and won't give it up till you come and fetch it."

"Oh, there's no fear of my not coming back."

"Stick to that. And, since you are stealing two days from me, tell Berengaria I shall keep you an extra week."

Miss Graystock did not quite believe in the birthday theory. "Her father," she decided, "has been told to get her down—to be wigged. I discern the cloven hoof of Frederick. The whole family is going to open its batteries on her. They will blow her exactly where they don't want her to go."

It was a churlish drizzling afternoon when Jac-

queline travelled down: the journey was not long, and she got home by tea-time. Her father had met her at the station, and in the brougham he said a word or two.

"I'm glad you were able to come," he began cheerfully. "I like to see you both at my side on my birthday."

"Of course I came. I've brought you a present—but I shan't give it you till to-morrow. How is mamma?"

"Oh, pretty well. But, Jacqueline, she—you are not very popular in that quarter just now. I thought I'd just warn you."

"What is the matter?"

"She thinks Berengaria is troubled about you, and you know she thinks of nothing but your aunt."

"Papa! But why should she think Aunt Berengaria 'troubled' about me. *Is* she?"

"Well, my dear, I don't know. Berengaria is anxious. She is of an anxious temperament."

"And who has been making Aunt Berengaria anxious about me? Frederick, I suppose."

Sir Jeremy looked guilty, and tried to look judicial.

"Well, Jacqueline: Frederick is—he really has wonderful common sense and *nous*. And being your only brother——"

"I must say, papa, that I think one brother ample."

"Well, I don't care for very large families myself. There is no concentration in a large family: but Frederick is an excellent son and a most affectionate brother: quite anxiously affectionate."

"I'm not a bit anxious about *him*. He will always behave beautifully, and be a perfect success."

"Oh, I think so. He has always been excellent. And . . ."

"And a little tedious."

"Jacqueline!"

"Well, so he is. At least he is very tedious in mixing himself up in my affairs. Papa, please understand that I will not stand any interference from Frederick."

Sir Jeremy was somewhat cowed. On arriving at Boon Court he did not at once join the rest of the party, but left Jacqueline to do so alone. She found them all in the saloon. Lady Berengaria had a headache, and her complexion had a peculiar blackish look. Frederick's complexion was all right, and he was making an excellent tea, but he was a little nervous, which he covered by an air of slight crossness. Lady Adelgitha was undisguisedly cross; she hated rain, and she did not like the cake she was eating.

"Berengaria," she was saying, "this cake tastes of tallow-candles and cupboard. It is like railway cake. I hope you will rate the still-room maid. Oh, how do you do? You smell of rain. You

come from London, I understand; been staying, I hear, with my cousin, Amelia Graystock."

She hardly endured Jacqueline's kiss, and her face expressed a disapproval that was very nearly dislike.

"There! go and kiss your aunt. You should try and please *her*. Your duty is to *her*. Your brother does it: there is no fault to find with his *behaviour*. Probably he has good principles: and that is more important than manner. Manner is an inheritance, but proper principles can be acquired."

Frederick did not appear much gratified by these commendations. Lady Berengaria looked troubled by them; but her embrace, when Jacqueline kissed her, was tender and loving.

"You spoil her," observed Lady Adelgitha, "and she doesn't repay your kindness. You take her out of her place. That's the worst of adopted daughters: they presume. I dare say my Cousin Amelia Graystock found it the same. But if the girl worried her she was quite right to send her away."

"Oh, Addy," said her sister, "Amelia would like to keep her much longer. She wrote *insisting* that she must have Jacqueline back at once."

"Oh! Then I should let her go. Why keep her here if she makes you anxious?"

Berengaria was utterly miserable. She knew it

must seem to Jacqueline as if there had been open family discussion of her affairs, and loud family blame; and there had been nothing of the kind. Frederick had spoken to her, and he had also spoken, separately, to his father; Sir Jeremy and she had hardly said a word to each other. Not a word had ever been said in conclave.

Presently Sir Jeremy came in, with an air of elaborate cheerfulness and good humour.

"You had better ring for fresh tea," Lady Adelgitha remarked to his son; "Sir Jeremy Taylor can't be expected to drink cold tea: and the toast is leather."

Things were thoroughly uncomfortable, every member of the small party being uncomfortable except Lady Adelgitha, who was merely out of humour. She made it clear that she wished Jacqueline back in London, and the girl wished herself there quite as heartily. In Cousin Amelia's little drawing-room there was never any crossness.

"My cousin, Miss Graystock, Lady Berengaria says, wants you to return to her," observed Lady Adelgitha, speaking to her daughter as if to a stranger.

"Yes. I promised to go back on Friday."

"The day after to-morrow. How young people run about nowadays! Did she approve of your dashing down to the country for one day? Did you consult her?"

"I told her after I had written——"

"It was using my cousin's house rather like an hotel to make your own arrangements to go and come like that: you should have consulted her first."

"Oh, Addy," said her sister. "Amelia quite understood. Jacqueline came to keep her father's birthday."

"I wrote and begged her to come," Sir Jeremy explained.

"Oh! *You* invited her," remarked his wife, slightly raising her pretty eyebrows. Then, more suavely, with a bland urbanity full of condescension: "Your girl was quite right to do as you directed. In every class of life young people should be guided by their parents' wishes. Where there is only one parent *his* wishes must have double weight. Your wishes, indeed, must be Miss—Miss Bentham's law. Not merely as to leaving or returning to London, but in any plans you may arrange for her future."

In delivering herself of these wise *dicta* Lady Adelgitha spoke with great pregnancy of meaning. Everyone understood, and probably everyone almost wished that Jacqueline had been left in London. Frederick was sharp enough to know that his step-mother's speech must do great harm, and set his sister's back up against those whom she would hold responsible for them.

The rest of the afternoon and evening was not less unfortunate. Their mother dined downstairs and looked wonderfully pretty and graceful; but if her serenity was improved she maintained a didactic attitude towards her daughter, without once betraying the remotest consciousness that Jacqueline *was* her daughter. On leaving the drawing-room for the night she made a small oration.

"Good-night, my dear," she said, shaking hands. "For dear Berengaria's sake I take an interest in you. To her you are an adopted daughter. It is a great advantage to you—it would be to a girl in any position. But those advantages bring responsibilities: you are young; but not too young to be made to understand them. Obedience, first. It should be your aim to obey not only my sister's explicit directions, but her *wishes*. Otherwise there would be ingratitude . . ."

"Oh, Addy, darling," almost moaned poor Berengaria. "Between dear, dear Jacqueline and me such words as gratitude do not come in at all. Let us go upstairs now."

"Very well. But let her consider *you*; I know you consider *her*, perhaps too sedulously. Let her consult your wishes, not her own irregular caprices."

With a rather stately, and very emphatic inclination of her head Lady Adelgitha turned from Jacqueline. With a more stately, but very gracious,

inclination she made her acknowledgements of Sir Jeremy's politeness in holding the door open for the two ladies, pretty much as if he had been a footman. To Frederick she vouchsafed a nod and smile that seemed to say, "Behave yourself and I shall recognize and tolerate you."

Sir Jeremy was tempted to flee, but he was decent enough to come back into the room where his son and daughter would have been left *tête-à-tête*.

Jacqueline stood where her mother had left her, but had turned to the fire and was looking down into it. Her face was very pale and very sad, but not angry.

For a moment there was silence. Then she said: "She hates me."

She could hardly speak at all. Her lip trembled, and her lovely eyes, like and so unlike her mother's, were glistening with tears. A much deeper emotion than resentment of Frederick's interference was shaking her.

It was the first time either her father or her brother had ever heard her speak of her mother's obvious dislike of her. She had always refused to recognize it: as she had always refused to recognize her mother's madness.

"She hates me."

"My dear, my dear," said Sir Jeremy, "she—she is much afflicted."

Jacqueline heard him and knew very well what

he meant. It made it so much worse. She gazed down into the fire; and the tears crept down her cheek.

"And," her father continued, "she has but one idea—your Aunt Berengaria."

"And I," thought the girl, "who have always loved her better than Aunt Berengaria, am nothing to her."

Was that Nemesis? All the mother-love the girl had ever been shown had come from Berengaria, and all the real *daughter* love of the girl's heart had been given to her natural, and unnatural, mother. Her father had never needed it.

That night, before at last she slept, Jacqueline faced the two facts from which she had all her life been averting recognition, that her mother was mad and hated her. And they made the girl hate Boon Court.

CHAPTER XXXV

SIR JEREMY's birthday was not kept with any conspicuous cheerfulness. He received presents from his family, his wife administering hers as if it had been a tip; and at luncheon, after the servants had left the room, she drank his health.

"Many happy returns," she said, leaning forward with a quite majestic smile and bow. "I drink to your health, Sir Jeremy B—Joscelyn. May you be happy in your children. The little silk purse I

gave you (one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I didn't attempt it. It was a bit of brocade I had) was empty. Merely a souvenir. Berengaria thought . . ."

Catching Berengaria's eye she stopped herself and changed the intended course of her remark.

" . . . Berengaria thought, under the circumstances, you would prefer *not* to receive anything of intrinsic value."

This was so dreadful that Lady Berengaria dispatched a hasty note after luncheon to invite a couple of neighbours to dinner, on the ground that Jacqueline was down from London for the day: they accepted and Lady Adélgitha dined upstairs.

But as the morning had been rainy and the afternoon was fine the two sisters drove out together.

"Have you spoken to her?" asked Adélgitha with calm self-approval. "You see I paved the way."

"No, dear, I haven't spoken to her. There has been no opportunity."

"No opportunity! I thought she was here to *be* spoken to. You should *make* an opportunity."

It was Jacqueline herself who made it. The moment her aunt's maid left her room that night the girl went in.

"I wanted," she said, "to speak to you alone, and I leave by the early train to-morrow. Do get

into bed and I will sit on your bed and talk to you."

But Lady Berengaria, who had not yet said her prayers, sat down by the fire, and Jacqueline stood near her on the rug, again looking down into the flame.

"Aunt Berengaria, dear, dear Aunt Berengaria," she said, "you know—I hope you know—that I love you for all you have been to Freddy and to me . . ."

Berengaria did not fail to note that in her tone, as she mentioned her brother, there was no rancour or resentment.

" . . . And," the girl went on, "most of all for all you are to my mother. You know, don't you? that I do love you—if not as you deserve."

"More than I deserve!" And the kind and loving, dull and inexpressive woman touched the girl's arm with a great tenderness.

"No, Aunt Berengaria: for I have loved *her* best. Always."

"I know, dear. And I have thanked God for it."

They were both of them, however unlike, honest and true; and each felt the other's honesty and sincerity.

"But—Aunt Berengaria! I can't go on living here. Not now. Do you understand?"

"Yes, dear, I think so."

"I always loved her best. I do still. And, be-

cause I had all that love for her, I never would believe either of two things. You know what two?"

"One, I think I know."

"Not the other? That she hates me?"

"Oh, Jacqueline, Jacqueline! my darling child
. . ."

"But it is so. I know now. And I cannot live here. It cannot be home. And, Aunt Berengaria—is she not best when she is alone with you? Ah, yes—I am sure it is so. And it is because she loves you. She is worse with those she dislikes: and she dislikes me worst of the three of us."

The girl's terrible directness was grievous to her aunt, but she could not gainsay it.

"So," Jacqueline continued, "for her too it will be better I should stay away."

"For a time, perhaps," Berengaria admitted most reluctantly.

"Altogether."

"Do you mean you would live with Amelia altogether?"

"Till I marry."

There was no soft and pretty, blushing air of beginning to breathe a girl's secret here: no whisper of romance.

"But that may not be for some time: and Amelia moves about all the autumn and winter."

"Yes. But I can be married before that."

"Has—has anyone asked you to marry him, dear?"

"No, but he will. And now I will say 'Yes' when he asks me. I have thought it all over. I am sure he would wish it, and I am willing to be his wife."

"Dear Jacqueline! Are you—in love with him? You do not speak as if you were." Then, quite shy to find herself talking of being in love, the old maid added: "Do I know him?"

"You are acquainted with him; I do not think you do know him. You have had no opportunity, and he is very different from you."

"Is it," almost whispered her aunt, "Lord Helmsstone?"

"Oh no! You think he wants to marry me? I never thought of that. No, it isn't Lord Helmsstone: I like him—sometimes I like him. But, even if he asked me, I certainly would not marry *him*."

"I think he is very honest, and—certainly a gentleman."

"Oh yes, quite. It is Count Selvaggio whom I mean to marry. I'm sorry you don't like him."

What could poor Berengaria say? She could not say she did like him, and she *would* not say she disliked the man her niece declared her intention of marrying."

"Your father and brother," she said at last, "they will be much against it."

"It has nothing to do with Frederick," Jacqueline answered quite quietly, but with full decision. "Papa will not really care at all. No doubt he would like me to marry someone very great. But I don't care about that. And papa won't *really* mind. He is too good-natured."

"Do you not think I am good-natured?"

"Much more than that: you are the kindest person I ever met. But in this I cannot see with your eyes. I must see with my own."

"But if your father *forbade* it?"

"That he will not do. Aunt Berengaria, do you think *many* men would want to marry me?"

"My dear, yes! But you have not met many men."

"Yes, I have. Lots. They are very pleasant, and they like to dance, and talk, and so on. They think me very pretty. But, Aunt Berengaria, they know all about me. They are the sort of men papa would like to see me marry: of high rank
—,"

"Not higher than your own."

"Perhaps not. But they would none of them want to marry a girl whose children might be—mad!"

Berengaria shuddered, and did not dare to look at the face of the girl who said this, in a plain, cold voice.



"But Count Selvaggio—do you mean that he does *not* know?" she whispered at last.

"I can't tell. I will tell him when he asks me. But I do not believe it will make any difference."

Of course not! Whatever Jacqueline told him, Lady Berengaria thought, the Sicilian adventurer must know her niece to be immeasurably beyond his hopes. Then she felt her conscience prick her—how did she know he was an adventurer? She did not even really know that he was a Sicilian.

"He is a Catholic?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I think so."

"You only think so!"

"Well, we haven't talked about religion, not in that way. But I think he is a Catholic—not strict like you, you know."

It was all grievous to Berengaria, and this the worst of it all. She was turning about in her mind what to say, knowing all the time that nothing she could say would make much difference. She was quite sure Jacqueline would never have spoken like this had she not fully resolved to marry Count Selvaggio.

"Lord Helmstone is not a Catholic," the girl observed quietly, "and you did not seem to mind the idea of my marrying him."

"I was not at all anxious for you to marry him, but I thought it—less objectionable."

"Why?"

"Because he is a man we know all about——"

"What *good* do we know of him?" the girl interrupted. "You say he is honest and a gentleman; but what else can you say for him? He is idle, and useless."

What could Berengaria say? It was her own opinion. And how could she tell Jacqueline that she was sure he would not ill-use her? As to the other man, she was sure of nothing, except that she could put no trust in him.

"A bad Catholic," she said in a low voice, "is so unlikely to be a good man."

"Do you think Lord Helmstone a good man?"

"But, Jacqueline, you speak as if I had been urging you to choose Lord Helmstone——"

"You suggested his name. And you show you would prefer him of the two."

"Yes—of the two. Because I could trust him."

"And I," said the girl, "can trust Count Selvaggio. Mind," she added, "I do not mean that Lord Helmstone is not trustworthy. When I asked you if you considered him a good man, I did not mean that I think him bad. I don't think that. He is just an ordinary young London man, who does nothing, and is of no use to anyone. I don't suppose he does any harm."

"What does Count Selvaggio do?"

"I don't know. I feel sure he is not idle. He is

a man who does things; he has purposes in life. His character is strong."

Her aunt did not doubt any of this; but, then, no one knew what the things were which he did, what his 'purposes in life' were.

"You know," she observed, almost whispering again, "that you have a good deal of money, and will have much more some day?" She had never said such a thing in her life before, and her sallow cheeks reddened as she spoke.

Jacqueline paused a moment, and then answered:

"Have I? I never thought of it. I suppose we are all rather rich together—as people go. But I have never thought of that sort of thing."

"No, dear, of course not. But——"

"Well, if Count Selvaggio is not very well off, my being so will be a good thing: as far as that goes. But I do not think he is poor—though I know nothing about it. I never thought of it."

"No, my dear, of course not. But—but perhaps *he* has."

Again the old maid blushed. To suggest a sordid motive was so wholly unlike herself and all her habit of mind.

"I do not know; but I do not think he has. Of course, if he is not well off, he would rather marry a girl who was—especially if she had been used to being so."

"You do not think"—and now Berengaria's face

was very red indeed—"that your being rich was—has been an object—particularly?"

"No. I think *I* am the object. It sounds conceited, but I do."

"Indeed, it is not conceited. Any man might be desirous of marrying you for yourself."

"I think Count Selvaggio is."

"And you?"

"I? Oh, if he asks me I should say 'Yes' because I—because of something in him: or something about him."

"He is not very young."

"No. I don't care for *quite* young men."

"Do you think him—handsome?"

"Handsome? I never thought whether he was or no. Lord Helmstone is—it's all there is of him. Do you think being handsome matters so much?"

"No, my child, no."

Berengaria's flush had no chance of dying out; she could hardly believe it was herself who had been urging against her niece's suitor his want of personal beauty. The truth was she could not, for her life, understand the man's attraction. It seemed to her uncanny. He was foreign, dubious, without youth or charm of person—without character, for all she knew.

"He has not asked me yet," Jacqueline remarked, quite without embarrassment. "But I feel sure he will. At all events, I can't go on living

here. I could stand Freddy's interference, though it is more annoying than it used to be. But I cannot"—and here her voice fell, and she spoke in a whisper—"bear to hear mamma's way of speaking to our father. . . ."

"Shall you," her aunt asked, after a very tense pause—"shall you, before you go, tell your father and Freddy what you have told me?"

"No. I want you to tell papa. He can tell Frederick if he likes."

CHAPTER XXXVI

COUNT SELVAGGIO and Jacqueline were not married from Boon Court; Lady Adelgitha's health made it natural enough that another place should be chosen, and, though she and Berengaria owned a house in London, it had for many years been let. So the wedding was from Miss Graystock's tiny house, and there were no wedding guests; there was no room for any. Sir Jeremy came up and gave his daughter away, but even he slept at an hotel. Berengaria could not leave her sister, and Frederick was travelling on the Continent. Amelia was very glad the youth was away, and not very sorry that Berengaria could not be present. She felt rather guilty, as if she had mismanaged matters, though everyone knew she had had no responsibility.

Lady Louisa sent a present, and a note in which she said she wished the bridegroom were someone else.

Lord Helmstone also sent a present, but refused to be Selvaggio's best man; and Jacqueline never knew that he had been asked. He also felt guilty, and told Miss Graystock so when, in answer to his congratulations, she told him flatly that the marriage pleased no one but Jacqueline.

"Oh yes," the old lady agreed; "you and I are both guilty, but you're the worst."

"It was through his being my guest that she ever met him," said Helmstone ruefully.

"Exactly. That's what I meant."

But she meant more. And she did not mind his knowing it.

"No one else," he said, "ever had a chance."

"Just the same chances that this man had; but he knew how to use them. Lord Helmstone, it's a bad business, and it's no use crying over spilt milk. But we haven't seen the end of it yet. Do you trust him?"

"I have had no occasion to trust or mistrust him."

"But *do* you trust him? I do not. And I see you don't."

Helmstone had no answer to this, and the old lady went on:

"I'm ashamed of the marriage. I think I dislike it more than her father does."

"Ashamed of it? He belongs to our own world—he is in the best society, as they call it."

"He doesn't belong to any world. You meet him in big houses—but no one knows anything about him. Has he any relations?"

"Of course they are not in England."

"Pfuh! French people's relations are not in England, but one knows all about the relations of Frenchmen of position."

"France is so much nearer. Sicily is a long way off."

"Sicily! Yes, a savage island. But is he even a Sicilian? Princess San Giacomo Piccolo is a Sicilian, but she only said 'I've heard of him' when I asked her. Doesn't it strike you we do not so much as know his surname?"

"His surname?"

"Yes. He signs everything—settlements and so on—'Selvaggio' *tout court*."

"So do I sign myself 'Helmstone.'"

"Tut, tut! But we know your Christian and surname. I asked Jacqueline what his Christian name was; she didn't even know that much. She said she just called him 'You.' It appears his *petit nom* is Netto, but whether an abbreviation or a nickname, I don't hear. It was my impression he invented it on the spur of the moment."

"Miss Graystock, if you are all against it, why has it been permitted?"

"Hear the man! Because Jacqueline is Jacqueline. I found her as soft as butter: but she goes her own way. She has been mismanaged. Berengaria had no authority, and her father has no grit to use his. Her brother tried to use authority when he had none—and so far I don't blame her for refusing to yield him any."

"Nor do I."

"Well—you know what her poor mother is. I doubt if Jacqueline would have married at all—yet—if things had been normal at home. Berengaria is a saint, and no fool either; but whether she has been wise, as well as splendid, in acting as she has about Adelgitha I have begun to doubt. It has caused the house to be abnormal: none but near relations or very old and intimate friends could be asked there, and such friends die out as years go by. What chance had Jacqueline? She was bound to grow up queer, though she is as sane as I am. And she was bound to fall in love with the first man who cropped up. The mischief was done before she came to me."

Helmstone was conscious that two men had cropped up, and that Jacqueline had certainly not fallen in love with one of them. But he said:

"I do not believe she *is* in love with him."

"Not in love with him?"

"No. That's the worst of it."

Old Amelia immediately began to think Helmstone must be cleverer than she had given him credit for: in fact, she had always liked him and always thought him a little stupid. Anything she did not understand she thought must be uncommonly clever, as she understood most things quite well.

"Why on earth should she marry him if she wasn't?" she demanded, much *intriguée*.

"That's the mischief. She has never been in love. He came her way, and he—hypnotized is a rotten word: but he threw a spell over her. His singing, his music, caught her in toils. She is bewitched. She is not in love with Selvaggio, the man; but the ideas of him he has woven for her round himself have caught her in a web. It is something he represents to her. No girl could be in love with that waxy face."

"Miranda might have been in love with Caliban if Ferdinand had not turned up."

Miss Graystock could not help remembering that a Ferdinand *had* turned up. But she was immensely struck by Helmstone's penetration.

"I'm glad to think," she said, "that she isn't in love with the fellow. It makes me think better of her."

"Yes. But *is* it better?"

"God knows! I suppose every girl is bound to

fall in love sometime, and in her case it will come too late. But perhaps she never will. She is not like any other girl. She walks in a dream. She is quite capable of not marrying him on Tuesday at all!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! she might get into the carriage to drive to church, and on the way tell the coachman to drive to Paddington or Victoria instead, and go off to become a nun. How silly Selvaggio would look!"

Amelia smiled grimly at the idea of Selvaggio waiting in church for a bride who had gone off, on her wedding-morning, to become a nun. But Helmsstone could not smile; he was not in a mood for impressions of the bizarre.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"THERE's the bell," said Miss Graystock; "it is Jacqueline, I expect. She only went round to the Square."

"Then I had better say good-bye."

"No, not to me. You would meet on the stairs, and it would look as if you were running away. Stay and say good-bye to her instead."

Yes, to all intents and purposes it would be good-bye. No doubt he and Countess Selvaggio would meet, as both would be much in London, and both went about in the same world. But all the same,

this meeting must be good-bye. Jacqueline came in, and she smiled very amiably as she held out her hand to the young man. Her air was not that of a radiant bride, though it was serene and contented. Her marriage could not make her forget the sadness of her home: and she hardly thought of the new home, only of the man who would be its master.

"I am glad," she said, "to see you, to thank you for your present, though I wrote. It is much too good."

"I'm afraid it isn't good at all. I'm not a great hand at choosing things."

Just then Miss Graystock's maid came to the door and said her dressmaker was waiting. Could she see her, as the woman had to go on elsewhere?

"Yes, Phibbet; I told you I would see her. Lord Helmstone, I hope you will be here when I come back. I shall not be ten minutes."

So he and Jacqueline were left alone. She was thinking how extraordinarily handsome he was.

"Almost perfect beauty," she told herself. "But how little it means! It's all there is of him. He has no more behind it than his own picture has."

She knew Selvaggio had no beauty; since her aunt's remark on the subject she had looked at him with dispassionate scrutiny to see, and had frankly decided that he was plain. She did not care in the least; all the same, I think she had a sort of grudg-

ing jealousy of Helmstone for having so much more beauty than there was any occasion for.

"Miss Joscelyn," he said very simply, "I don't know how to congratulate—I am not glib."

("No," she thought; "you certainly have not *that* fault.")

"My tongue," he went on, noting what was passing in her mind very well, "never did me any service yet. I can't make you a pretty speech of felicitation, but I can say how happy I trust you may ever be."

"It is better," she answered, "to be sincere than—pretty. I know you are sincere."

"Yes, I am that. If I could ever be of use to you I should be happy too."

She had said he was of no use to anybody, and she remembered it now with a little compunction. She remembered with greater shame demanding of her aunt, "What *good* do you know of him?" She thought he *was* good: good of heart. What his conduct in life had been she could not know, and was not the girl to wonder or guess. She felt sure he was sincere and, as Berengaria had said, honest. And she saw that he was kind, gentle, and humble.

"Lord Helmstone," she said, "if we could all serve one another in life we should be happier. I do believe you would be glad to serve me—and if I could I would serve you."

("He is good. But he is idle," she was thinking. "A man with no purpose.")

"By changing me," he said, with a rather sad smile. For again he saw the course of her thoughts fairly accurately. "You have never approved of me."

She did not protest that she had, but answered as simply as he had spoken.

"I would serve you if I could, by giving you a purpose in life, an object."

He got up and turned towards the window, and she could not see his face: she wondered if he were offended. He was not offended: he was only saying to himself that she *could* have given him a purpose in life. He could not tell her that, so he made show of a counter-attack.

"*You* have an object in life—a purpose? Will you tell it me?"

She hesitated, and he went on, with a smile that was not very gay, but not at all sharp or severe:

"Is not your purpose in life to be happy, to get away from sadness?"

Could she deny it? What finer, more altruistic purpose had she?

"That you will achieve it is my earnest prayer," he added gently.

If she had meant to lecture him at all, to advise even, she no longer felt it possible. She did not feel in the least 'superior.' And it was he who had

slackened her bow-string by his very simple questions. For the moment she forgot he was only unreasonably good-looking.

"Why," she asked, not didactically, "can you not have at least that object?"

"I had it. But one cannot realize an object by desiring it."

"Not unless one's will is strong to attain it."

"Ah, Miss Joscelyn! But if one's purpose in life depended on *two* wills—one's own and someone else's?"

Jacqueline saw his face now, and something in it recalled to her mind how Berengaria had spoken of him as a possible husband for herself.

"I beg your pardon," she said simply. She had been stupid, but she could not be anything but sincere and direct. She understood, and could not pretend not to understand.

"There is no need. Did you not know?"

"Not till you said that."

If she had known it could have made no difference. Helmstone was sure of that. Nevertheless, he was angry with himself. That other fellow had at all events made her see what he wanted, and he could not have been *sure* of success. In that he had been more manly, as Helmstone, who had never thought him very manly, told himself savagely. And Jacqueline (perhaps because she was a woman), though she was sure she could never

have given him what he wanted, despised him a little for not having ventured to ask for it.

"Still," he said, turning to say farewell, "we can be friends."

("Why 'still'?" she wondered.)

"If you will let me," he ended, holding out his hand, "I will always be your friend to serve you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FOR some time after their marriage Count and Countess Selvaggio travelled upon the Continent. They went to many countries, and in all of them he seemed to have many friends, or acquaintances, in almost every class; but it was only those of almost the highest class whom Selvaggio introduced to his wife. They were of the diplomatic service, and of the naval and military services, especially. Selvaggio seemed able to speak all languages, and Jacqueline was a little ashamed of her own deficiency. She hardly knew any language, even French, with real fluency or correctness. She could understand a German book or an Italian song, but she found she could not talk either of those languages. Her husband had an immense correspondence, and her own correspondents were few, so that while he wrote his letters she had to amuse herself. This, as she had never cared for amusement, she found rather a heavy task. She had con-

temned Lord Helmstone for being useless, and for having no definite object or purpose in life. What were hers? To whom was her existence of any benefit? To kill time was hardly a 'purpose in life.'

"Netto," she said one day, "I'm terribly useless. Can't you make use of me? You have such an immense correspondence—if any of the letters require copying, can't I do that for you?"

Selvaggio did not seem entranced by the proposal.

"They are frightfully dull letters," he declared, "and in all sorts of languages. I'm sure you could not copy them. And I've too much conscience to let you try. I shouldn't like my wife to be my private secretary."

His tone had a finality in it which did not invite further discussion, and Jacqueline, ashamed of her linguistic deficiencies, did not press the subject. She certainly did not want to hinder him in his work, as he seemed to think she would.

It happened one afternoon that she had been out alone, and, returning to the hotel, where she had left her husband deep in correspondence, she went straight to his room, expecting to find him there. He was not there, but on the table was a pile of letters, and the topmost, in a large envelope, was in Lord Helmstone's handwriting. Of course it attracted her attention.

What did so, much more disagreeably, was the

sound of her husband's Swiss valet's voice at the door. He was outside in the corridor, and he spoke in low tones; but Jacqueline had very quick ears, and though the man spoke in German, she both heard and understood.

"The Countess," he said, "is in there, and your letters are on the table. A great many came while you were out."

"You should have put them in the drawer."

"I couldn't, Herr Graf; you had locked all the drawers before going out."

Selvaggio came in, and anyone could see that he was out of temper about something.

"Were you looking," he asked, "to see if there were any letters for you?"

"Oh no. I wasn't expecting any; and if I had been, I should not have looked among yours for them."

"Why not? Though I confess I agree with you that the middle-class conjugal idea of letters in common doesn't appeal to me."

It was quite obvious that he really thought she had been turning over his letters, and Jacqueline was thoroughly annoyed. His servant had, apparently, suggested the idea, and his master had adopted it. It was difficult not to derive the impression that the servant considered himself more in his master's confidence than his master's wife.

"I have been," said Jacqueline, turning to the

door that led into their drawing-room, "to the Royal Gallery. I did not feel much in the humour for pictures, I found, and came back earlier than I meant. As I left you here writing, I thought I might find you here."

She did not speak with the slightest betrayal of temper, but with more aloof dignity than he had ever seen in her.

"I had to go out," he replied. "Thank you for coming to look for me."

"Of course I came," she said, resolving, while she said it, to come no more when uncertain whether he were in or not.

Perhaps this small episode would have had less power to annoy her had she not been feeling dissatisfied. Her absolute idleness and uselessness was a burden to her. Probably she had had some notion of being useful to her husband in his life, which she saw more and more was a very busy one. But he made it plain that he regarded her as outside that life; and she chafed under that, and still more under the feeling that she was to be considered as merely ornamental—recreational, so to speak. She had never cared for ornaments, and to sink into being one was contrary to all her impulses. She, of course, could not realize that Selvaggio was pluming himself on not allowing that subterranean life of his to touch hers. He told himself that it showed how thoroughly he was a

gentleman thus to forego all use of his wife for business purposes. It is not a very good sign of a man when he finds it comforting to have proofs to himself that he is a gentleman.

Jacqueline had her own drawing-room in the hotel, as her husband had his own small writing-room. But they dined downstairs, and occasionally she would go after dinner, if he were busy, to one of the public rooms to glance at the English newspapers. On this particular evening Selvaggio, while they were dining, asked her if she would care to go to a theatre.

"No, thank you, I think not. I have a headache—just the beginnings of one. It is really nothing; but the weather is stuffy and the theatres are so hot."

"Yes, they are. I should be delighted to take you if you would like to go. But if not I will work, for I have a great many letters to write. I think Von Storn may come round on chance of our sharing his box—I saw him for a moment while I was out. But if he does, we can tell him he must go alone."

The Freiherr von Storn was German Consul, a comparatively young man, and, as Jacqueline had thought, rather too fine a gentleman for his position. In reality, he was extremely capable and efficient, doing a great deal of business for his country which lay outside the mere humdrum detail of

consular work. To Jacqueline he was laboriously civil, but she had a vague dislike of him.

"If Baron von Storn does come," she remarked indifferently as they rose from table, "would you mind making my excuses? I suppose he will be shown up to our rooms, and I am going to read the papers."

"Oh, certainly! There is no need for you to be bored."

So Selvaggio, who really had business with Von Storn, and wished particularly to see him alone, was well pleased.

"If," he said, as he opened the door of the public drawing-room for her—"if I send a waiter—or Köder—to tell you that Von Storn has come, you will understand, then, that it does not mean that I am begging you to come up, merely an intimation that he is there if you want to keep out of the way."

"Oh, yes; do send—a waiter."

Her emphasis on the word was so slight that Selvaggio, who was thinking of quite different things, really did not notice it, and did not ask himself why she should ask that a waiter should be sent instead of his 'Swiss' servant.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"SOME say there will be war quite soon."

The remark did not even make Jacqueline look up to see who had made it. She had heard the same sort of statement made and contradicted over and over again.

Most of the guests were either still in the dining-room or had gone off to the theatre or to some other evening engagement. There were only three other people in the room, and they were hidden from Jacqueline by a big group of palms.

"There is a man in this hotel who could tell us if he chose," observed one of the three in a sententious voice.

Still Jacqueline heard, but without attention.

"Really! Who?" demanded the first speaker, with eager curiosity.

Now, the first speaker was a somewhat elderly young lady, the second a gentleman of perhaps seven-and-thirty. These two sat with their backs to the door by which Jacqueline had entered; but the third of the three, who had not yet spoken, was an old lady who had seen her come in.

"If anybody," the gentleman was beginning to answer, "knows secrets it is Count Sel——"

But he was only allowed to begin; the old lady opposite signalled vehement discouragement, and,

with one hand slightly raised, pointed to where Jacqueline sat.

"His wife is there," she whispered, leaning forward.

"Oh, come, Mrs. Euston," the gentleman protested, laughing, and at the same time winking to draw attention to his deft diplomacy, "I don't know that any of us are special friends of Count Selbstsucht. *He* is the know all."

Now, for all Jacqueline knew, there might be a Count Selbstsucht in the hotel; but the sudden pause, hush, interruption, and laughing had caught her attention, as, naturally, the first syllable of her husband's name had done so before.

She incidentally rose, and walked across the room to another table, as if to get another paper: not because she wanted to see the other group, but in order to be seen by them.

The old lady got up also, and came over to her.

"You don't remember me, Countess Selvaggio?"

"Oh yes, I do now," answered Jacqueline; "I couldn't really see you behind those palms. I heard your name, but it did not at once occur to me where I had heard it before. You are Mrs. Euston. We once travelled by train together."

"You have a very polite memory!" said the old lady.

That seemed to Jacqueline nonsense. Either one

remembered or one did not; it was a question of fact, not of politeness.

"Bernard," said Mrs. Euston to her son, who had risen from his seat, "Countess Selvaggio and I met in a train. And I stole her newspapers and reviews."

This, the girl thought, was matter, not of fact, but of fiction.

"Oh no," she said, "I gave them to you."

"Not till after I had taken them."

"That," said Mr. Euston, "*sounds* very like stealing."

"Oh, quite, Aunt Merèda!" quoth the elderly young lady.

("Merèda! What a Christian name!") thought Jacqueline.

"This," said Mrs. Euston, "is my niece, Miss Talacre. And this, of course, is my son."

("Why 'of course'?" thought Jacqueline; "he might be her dentist.")

Perhaps it was his obtrusively fine teeth that made her think of a dentist—that and his smile, which was peculiarly reassuring, as if he were earnestly trying to convince the public that his methods were painless. He was a largish young man with big, stout legs, big forensic hands, white and soft-looking, a large, talkative mouth, and large white ears. But his eyes were smallish, and

so was his nose. He bowed twice while being introduced.

Miss Talacre only bowed once, but she almost curtsied. She had once been slim and was now lean; she had been called graceful, and still considered grace her strong point.

"They are all over-civil," thought Jacqueline; "they feel guilty. They were certainly talking of my husband."

"I couldn't help," she remarked presently, "hearing your talk of Count Sel—Selbstsucht. So I got up and showed myself. I really didn't want to eavesdrop."

None of the three looked less guilty at this. Mr. Euston smiled more profusely than ever. Miss Talacre smiled as much as she could—her lips were thin and her mouth was narrow. Mrs. Euston looked a little frightened.

"He must be," Jacqueline went on, "a celebrity. Is that so?"

"Oh, I don't think he affects that rôle! Rather shuns it than not. I dare say you never heard the name?"

"No. I never did. But *you* know him?"

"Oh—quite."

"Do describe him."

"Well, he is very tall, and very thin, and very fair, and he can talk no language but German. He is an old bachelor—a misogynist."

"How quickly you describe! And how well! I seem to see him," said Jacqueline.

Mr. Euston grinned with real complacency; he thought his impromptu very dexterous.

"What a contrast," the girl continued, turning to Mrs. Euston, "to my husband, who is not a bit thin, and is very dark, and rather short, and talks every language under the sun: and is—married to me."

Mr. Euston's smile did not fail, but it became somewhat galvanic.

"I suppose," said Jacqueline, "Count Sel—Selbstsucht *has* to be a misogynist. A man who knows all secrets could never marry."

"That must be his great loss," gasped Mr. Euston, bowing again, and under the confused impression that he was saying something personally complimentary to Jacqueline.

The door opened and Köder appeared; coming half-way across the room, he bowed to Jacqueline and stood still, as if to intimate he had a message for her, but would not intrude upon her conversation.

Jacqueline felt a slight sense of irritation that her husband had sent this man instead of one of the waiters. But she went across the room to him.

"Has the Count sent a message?" she asked, carelessly and quite aloud.

"The Herr Count," answered Köder, answering

in a very much lower voice, "desired me to tell the Frau Gräfin that the Freiherr von Storn is upstairs."

"Thank you," said Jacqueline, and she turned away, but without returning at once to the group she had left. Then it struck her that she had left them rather abruptly on Köder's entrance, and though she was direct and without *finesse*, she never intended to be discourteous. So she went back to them, and asked Mr. Euston, with a smile, why Count Selbstsucht was so likely to know whether there would be war or no.

"Because," said Mr. Euston, grinning, "he is pretty sure to know whether Germany intends war or not. It all turns on that."

Just then people began dropping into the room by twos and threes, and the subject of Count Selbstsucht was dropped. But when Jacqueline moved away to a rather distant chair, Mrs. Euston stuck to her, and sat down at her side.

"How odd we should meet again!" she remarked, smiling blandly. She was full of curiosity, and delighted at the rencounter.

"Well," said Jacqueline, "since we were here and you came here, we were pretty sure to meet."

("I thought her surprisingly clever just now," thought the old woman. "Is she clever, or is she only stupid?")

Then aloud:

"We haven't been here three hours. Chatty and I only joined Bernard here this evening. He has been here a week."

"Yes; I have seen him."

"Of course," Mrs. Euston observed, "we had heard of your marriage."

"I dare say," answered Jacqueline, who was getting tired of Mrs. Euston, which that lady perceived with resentment.

"Of course," she said, adjusting her watch-bracelet, "it was mentioned a good deal. People were—interested."

("Everything is 'of course' with her") thought the girl, but she made no audible comment on the old woman's remark.

"You," said Mrs. Euston, watching her carefully, "were so well known."

"On the contrary, I should say few people could be so little known—unknown, in fact."

Mrs. Euston patted the arm of Jacqueline's chair with her fan and smilingly protested.

"My dear Countess, you are quite too modest! A *débutante* and an heiress, and a beauty! Of course everybody was interested."

The allusions to her beauty and to her being an heiress thoroughly irritated Jacqueline. She thought them impertinent. But she could not notice them.

"I wasn't even a *débutante*," she said, with an

intentional air of boredom. "I had never stayed for any time in London before; but isn't a *débutante* a girl who has just been presented, and I have never been presented even now."

"She is trying to snub me!" thought Mrs. Euston, with animosity. She considered herself a very important social personage.

"Not presented? Not yet? Not even on your marriage? Impossible!" she cried.

"Facts," laughed the girl, "can't be impossible. And I certainly have never been presented. We left England on the day of our marriage."

"Of course, you will be, immediately you return?"

"I really don't know. I have never thought about it at all." And Jacqueline rose, determined to escape.

"Are you going? I am so sorry. Such a cosy chat! You will introduce the Count to me? You know I have never met him."

"No, I didn't know."

"Of course one has *seen* him—one sees him everywhere. And, indeed, I've *heard* him. *What* a musician! *Off* the stage I've never heard such a voice. Nor Chatty. Chatty thoroughly understands music."

"Of course," said Jacqueline innocently.

"Quite so. It is *in* her. But I suppose all Italians are born musicians."

"Are they? I have not noticed it here in Italy. And I didn't know Miss Talacre was Italian."

"Of course not! I was alluding to Count Selvaggio. What romantic *names* Italians have! Selvaggio! And I dare say the family name is just as romantic."

Jacqueline knew very well that the old woman was angling coarsely for information, but she gave none. Oddly enough, she did not even yet know whether her husband was Italian or Sicilian, nor whether Selvaggio were only a title-name or that of his family. She was not in the least inquisitive, and had never asked; and he had never volunteered the information. That Mrs. Euston was inquisitive she saw very clearly, but without wishing, even had she been able, to enlighten her.

Quarter of an hour later Selvaggio came into the room.

CHAPTER XL

"HE," said Selvaggio, bending over his wife, and speaking in a low voice, but without mentioning any name, "has gone now."

"Only now! He will be rather late for the theatre."

"Oh, he went some time ago, but I wrote a letter before coming down."

At that moment someone else came in, and left the door open: Jacqueline saw Von Storn outside in

the hall wrapping a silk handkerchief round his throat. Her husband's eyes followed hers, and they saw the German too. Selvaggio was annoyed; he did not want Jacqueline to know that he told lies.

"What on earth," he said, "has been keeping him?"

"My dear Countess," said Mrs. Euston, who had ambled across to them, "you *must* introduce me to Count Selvaggio."

The introduction was made, and the old woman cried:

"We met in the train, you know! Quite romantic! And I stole her newspapers. Delightful to meet again."

When Jacqueline and her husband got upstairs, he asked, not very amiably:

"Who is that old woman?"

"Mrs. Euston. Her son is here."

"Yes, I know. A Member of Parliament, very busy and important. A faddist. A bore of the first water."

"I think that is an heirloom in the family. *She* is certainly one. She has been trying to worm information out of me——"

"Information, about what?"

"Well, about you."

Then Jacqueline told him the whole story, omitting only Mrs. Euston's reference to herself as an

heiress and a beauty. He listened carefully, with hardly an interruption. But when she had finished he said, with unmistakable irritation:

"And this old gossip—you really only know her from a chance meeting in the train?"

"Yes. I never saw her again until to-night."

"And now she is as thick as thieves with you, and pumps you about my affairs!"

"I certainly thought her impertinent."

"Of course she was impertinent. But, really, Jacqueline, I hope you won't make a practice of chumming up with chance strangers in the train."

His tone was so much less courteous than any he had ever used to her that she was astounded.

"Mrs. Euston," she said, "was the first instance, and it has proved such a nuisance that I do not think you need fear a second."

"I hope not," he replied, with angry insistence.

Jacqueline was not angry, but she was annoyed—annoyed to find herself inwardly protesting against a storm in a teacup. The old woman had been outrageously curious—as it seemed to the girl, vulgarly prying and inquisitive; but it was all about trifles. And if anyone had 'scored,' it had not been Mrs. Euston. Her husband had not once smiled while he listened to his wife's quite amusing repetition of the conversation: Jacqueline had thought that he would. He had, instead, seemed unreasonably fretted and perturbed.

"Surely," she said frankly, smiling, "it is of no consequence. She is evidently ill-bred. But does it matter?"

"It matters more than you think. It may be of more consequence than you can guess. It does not seem to strike you as offensive that your husband should be spied upon by a pack of strangers you admit to your acquaintance without the slightest reason."

"Netto!"

"I have described the facts. Please do not cultivate these people. I consider it important. You understand?"

"Certainly I shall not 'cultivate' them."

"And you understand my position?"

"I understand," she answered slowly, "that my having talked to Mrs. Euston, or submitted with rather a bad grace to be talked to by her, has given you great annoyance."

"Very natural annoyance."

"I shall not offend again. But, Netto, if other people—not Mrs. Euston—should seem to wish to talk to me about my husband, would it not appear odd if I should refuse to speak on that subject?"

"Odd! To refuse to be pumped about my private affairs, of which you know nothing—there is nothing more dangerous than talking in the dark."

How could she help asking herself why she *should* be necessarily talking in the dark. She felt

uncomfortable; she knew herself to be anything but talkative, but how could it be comfortable to have a continual consciousness that the one topic specially interdicted should be her husband? I think the people who most dislike gossip and chatter are also those who most dislike secrets and mysteries. Selvaggio, clever in many ways, was far from being clever in almost himself suggesting that he was mysterious and had a secret.

The fact was that, though he flattered himself he knew her as thoroughly as an easy little book, he did not really know her. He had proved it twice that day: by suspecting her of examining the outsides of his letters, and by letting her see that he thought her capable of it; and later by accusing her of readiness to chatter about him and his affairs. He did not, evidently, even know how proud she was, and how her pride was set on edge by both accusations. But what she was shrinking from most was the admission to her mind of the wretched thought (that he had twice in one day forced to knock at its resolutely closed doors) that he who brings mean accusations must himself be mean. They had been married several months, and during them he had on repeated occasions given glimpses of a mind that was not that of a gentleman. There are many errors of speech which do not stamp vulgarity on the speaker; but there are some vulgarisms of speech which it is hard to hear

and acquit him who has used them of being vulgar. That concerns mere language. But there are expressions of opinion which are like some symptoms of disease and compel recognition; one who has lived only among gentlemen cannot hear them and not note them with a shock of revelation that the speaker is tainted.

For a long time Jacqueline had been, both obstinately and conscientiously, refusing to give the smallest admission to her mind of the fact that her husband was tainted. But he was: and facts came driving themselves home ruthlessly.

On this night he was not even wise. Preoccupied, anxious, and busy about many things, he was blind to the impressions he was forcing on his wife's by no means dull comprehension. She did not suspect him, but he compelled her to see that he was suspicious.

He was playing in a game of deep import, concerning whole peoples, and he had to play it through individual persons—of course. But he was too eager, too absorbed, too much excited, to have clear and calm eyes for the person nearest to himself. Carried away by the magnitude of his game, that near reality was for the moment unimportant. She was only his wife. No wife could be to him what his international game was. He praised himself for not drawing her into it—as if she *could* have been drawn! She could therefore be no help

to him in it; and only what could help was just now of any importance to him. Only she must not hinder. How terribly she might hinder if she were curious or talkative! Better to have remained unmarried than that. He had married her chiefly to consolidate his position in England, where, until lately, most of his employment had been for some time, and where it would soon be again; and it had pleased him to think that she was a blind child, blind in devotion to himself, as her marrying him had proved, and sure to see only through his eyes: a tool perhaps the more likely to be of use because so completely unconscious.

He had also desired her, he had assured himself, for herself, meaning really her beauty and distinction of person. He could never have linked himself to a plain wife. His whole nature was sensuous, and his love of beauty in sound and form and colour was only part of it. Also, he liked the sense of her money and possessions, and of her rank.

Nevertheless, having secured her and all these things, he was occasionally bored by her. He told himself it must be trying at times for a grown man to live perpetually with a child. What really tried him was the constant presence of innocence and single-hearted honesty. She could never be taught the charm of a scheme, a plot, for anything; she would, if driven to recognize it, only be sickened by the spectacle of greed whether for wealth or place or

secret power and influence. She would never be malleable in such ways as that, though he had pictured her as wax in his deft and strong hands. This was what he meant by calling her a child, perhaps because he was slow and unwilling to admit a mistake (and this was not his first or last), though it rather went to prove her not quite the pliant child he had imagined. Honest innocence, and an instinctive aversion from secret calculation he called childishness.

CHAPTER XLI

JACQUELINE was rather dismally plodding round a church in which (said the guide-book) there were several important examples of several of the greatest masters. She had heard a late Mass, and after it, feeling disinclined to go back to the hotel, she thought she would look at these famous 'examples' about which she had been reading a day or two before. She knew much more about pictures now, having seen in the course of their travels many of the finest in the world.

But she did not begin her tour of the church at once—as soon as the very short high Mass, hardly longer than a low Mass at home, was over. The people went out, and she knelt on. She was really praying, not eloquently with her lips, nor with the wonderful lifting of spirit that had been

her mental prayer in the convent till that last horrible morning on which she had left it, but really. For her own heart was creeping, as a shamefaced child creeps to its neglected father, to the Heart of God. The spiritual part of her was stiff, and did not move with spontaneous ease, as one's body moves when normal and healthy and freely exercised. She had to move it: it would not get up and move of itself. She had to force it, and it would only budge at all at her insistence. She had often since her marriage—indeed, almost always—found it so. And at first she had let herself be easily discouraged. But of late she had been more resolute not to accept discouragement.

"I am mean," she said in her heart; "while it was not a necessity of life to speak to You I let it alone when I found it was hard. I was content to put my life in *him*. Now that I can no longer do without You, I take whatever trouble it may be to speak. I *must* speak: even if it does not seem that You listen. But I know You listen, because You are not like us. I am sure You will listen, though You may not answer very soon. You were listening to my unhappiness before I tried much to speak. Were You pitying? I cannot imagine You seeing pain and not pitying, even if it should be best to let the pain go on. Perhaps it is best. Perhaps it *must* go on—always, always. I made the cause, and not You. The effect does not come from You,

but from myself. . . . You may not think it right to deliver me from the effect. There may be no way. . . . It cannot be hard for You to forgive silliness Who forgive sin so easily; but the effects of sin often last, and go on to quite the end of one's own life and of lives after, though the sin has been quite forgiven: and perhaps the effects of my silliness must go on quite to the end—of me. Only forgive it. For I am sorry. Why should I tell You, Who know everything? No doubt it is what has happened to me that brought me to see and be sorry; but I am not sorry, now, *simply* because I am in trouble. I hope not. You know all about it. I am made humble and ashamed. I can only grope about. . . . But I want to say how it is—how it has all been. When one goes to confession one has to tell the priest everything, though he is only there in Your place, and listening for You, Who know it all. So I tell You the whole thing. . . . I was always unhappy at home, because of the two things I knew, but *would* not know—that my mother detested me, and that she was mad: and the life seemed useless. We were always fussing about the poor people, and I did not think it very good for them. I thought it made them cringing and false and hypocritical. I thought we were bribing those who were not Catholics to pretend they wanted to be Catholics. I was wrong very likely, for I never understood them. I liked best those who did not

seem at all pious. And, oh! I was bored. I read in books of the glory of youth, and there was no glory in mine, only dulness; and it seemed to me that I must be dull until I died. Then one day I thought I heard You calling 'Come up higher,' and I asked nobody, but went and made a Retreat, and all the time I thought You were still calling 'Come up—higher: to My side.' And I thought Contemplative Religion the highest way, so I went straight off to run along it. At first I had no doubt; I was in heaven already, and had forgotten the dulness of earth, of the life on it, and the people in it—my own people. Then suddenly I fell down and found I was on earth, shut up in one dull house on it, and I would not stop, but went home. And I found home wretched, cross, and narrow and stupid. And I would not try to pray—because I was afraid of finding I couldn't, as it was on that last horrible morning in the convent. And also because I felt tired of it, as if I had been praying too much all those months and must rest from it. Then *he* came, and I heard him sing, and he revealed beauty to me, and emotion, and I thought *there* was something. And he put into my mind another thought—You know, and the offence is not in telling You now—I thought You were melancholy, and I was so sad that I was shrinking from sadness. I wanted to forget it, and I turned to beauty. Let ears and eyes fill my heart, since it was empty else. One

might be happy in the Palace of Beauty. And he roused emotion in me, and to *feel* something was like coming alive, I being all numb before. I was never thinking of *him*, only of the things he half showed me—of a way of life along which he could lead me. Then I went home, and found I could not bear it when I *knew* she was mad and hated me just because she was mad. I knew he wanted to marry me, though I never thought he was in love with me; if I had thought he was, I would not have let him marry me, for it would have been cheating, because I was not in love with him. 'Is it necessary to be in love?' I thought. It seemed to me that in the very good books they don't make much account of being in love. And I knew my mother had married my father because she fell in love with him, and I knew she had disliked and despised him for years—ever since I could see things.

"So I married. And almost at once I began to see that it is horrible being married when you are not in love, brutal, disgusting. But I was married, and, if I had no business to have been married, it was done, and so it must be my duty henceforward to be married. And so, too, it must be my duty to love my husband. And I tried, and tried, and tried. I am trying all day long. Will You help? Shut my eyes to all I should not see in him; open my heart to every call from him that would lead to loving him. Perhaps I should love him if I were

the mother of his child; if so, will You send me one? He will not let me share his real life (and do not let me know what it is if it is something I should be ashamed of)—not till I can love him. I have been silly all along. That's what has been the matter. Forgive the silliness as You do sins. . . ."

She rose at last, and began going round the church, from chapel to chapel. But, though she found the famous pictures easily, and examined them, she was not thinking of them. The light was very bad, for a black rain was falling outside, and it was darker than twilight in the church. But if the pictures had shown up in all their glory of colour it would have made no difference. No one else, she thought, was going round the chapels; and when she came to the last, next the west door, very dim and dusky, because its only window was filled with nearly black eleventh-century stained glass, she did not attempt to examine the celebrated fresco by Pinturricchio it contained. She knelt down in a corner and began to pray again.

Presently she heard the door in the nave open—one of two small doors to left and right of the great central door never opened except for processions and functions—and some people came in. Apparently they were standing still to look along the great dim nave. In reality, they were not giving any at-

tention to the church at all. They had merely come in there to take shelter from the rain.

"And you say," said one of the new-comers, quite clearly and with delighted interest, "that he is a spy! A German spy!"

"An accredited Secret Service Agent of his Government," came the answer in a twittering giggle; "that would be the language of diplomacy."

It was as certainly Mr. Euston's voice as the other had been Miss Talacre's.

"But," she objected, "I thought he was Italian or Silician."

"Oh, that is only a title he bought. It is the name of a ruined tower in Sicily, and whoever owns the tower is Count Selvaggio. His father is a very respectable old pig-dealer in Westphalia, but he has minted money as a sp—Secret Service Agent."

The instant Jacqueline heard her own name she leapt from her knees; but she had been kneeling on the thick carpet of the altar, and made no sound till she was out of the chapel and her light, hasty footfall sounded on the marble pavement of the nave. She turned straight to the door, and had passed the speakers in a moment, without greeting them or even bowing.

But they saw her, and saw who she was.

"*Now the fat's in the fire!*" said Mr. Euston, almost whistling.

"Oh, she must know! I'm sure she knew when

she was snubbing us about Count Selbstsucht the other night."

"Very likely. But she knows now that *we* know."

"So she must when she was taking her revenge by 'roasting' you about Count Selbstsucht. I really don't see that any great harm is done."

"*He* may make things very unpleasant. I'm sure of my facts, but it is a different matter to prove them. Of course, she'll go straight and tell him."

"I don't feel so sure of that. Wives don't always tell their husbands everything—not by any means."

Thus spoke the spinster oracularly.

CHAPTER XLII

MEANWHILE through the black rain—and to hear Italians talk you would suppose it never rained except in England!—Jacqueline was hurrying home to the hotel. She was not really thinking, only undergoing one eternally self-iterating thought, as the anvil undergoes the repeated blows that fall on the red-hot iron it supports. Her husband must be told. He must be told. Not to leave him ignorant *must* be her duty. No other duty presented itself yet.

And how intolerable the doing of that one duty must be! So she almost ran to the doing of it.

Could it be her duty to subject him to the ignominy of showing him that his wife knew? Could it

be a wife's duty to tear the veils of reticence aside and let him stand before her shamed?

She stood still a second or two, almost tripping in the suddenness of her stopping, and let the chill rain drench her.

There could not be two contrary duties; and he must not be left ignorant. She sped on again. She was wet through before she reached the hotel, but she did not think of it. Across the hall and to the wide, handsome staircase she hurried quite blindly. Their rooms were on the first floor, and there was no need to wait for the lift. In the corridor she met her own maid.

"Oh, my lady!" (Nothing would make the woman call her mistress, a Countess, anything but 'My lady.') "Oh, my lady! I hoped you were somewhere under cover, in some gallery, or in some church. If I had known where to go I should have gone to look for your ladyship with wraps and an umbrella—and you're wet through and through. . . ."

"Never mind. Where is the Count?"

"In his study, my lady."

Jacqueline turned away at once and went into the room where her husband wrote letters and saw most of his visitors. Heavy velvet curtains were hung over the door that led from it into their drawing-room. Baron von Storn was with Selvaggio, and her entrance interrupted a conversation that

was clearly important. Selvaggio greeted her entrance with a look of undisguised annoyance, and said petulantly:

"Really, Jacqueline, I am most seriously engaged."

"The Countess," said Von Storn courteously, "is terribly wet."

She bowed to him very courteously too, but said quietly:

"I only interrupt your talk with my husband because I wish to let him know something without delay."

"I think it had better wait," declared Selvaggio—"at all events till you have changed into dry clothes."

But Von Storn, who had noted the girl's face quite as observantly as her drenched clothing, bowed to her again and left the room.

"Well, Jacqueline!"

"I've heard something that I am sure you ought to know—for your guidance," she said simply.

He had risen, and they were both standing up, the breadth of his writing-table between them. Then she told him, in very few words, what she had heard."

"And you," he said, with no show of shame, but with flaming anger—"and you come here, like a daft woman, a tragedy queen, and turn my friend

out of my room, to tell me to my face that I am a spy!"

He was furiously angry that his trade was known; and because she was there, and almost a child, his fury fell on her. She could not help knowing it—and him. She saw that he would gladly have struck her, might have struck her, but for the table between them. Of such a blow she had no physical fear, but she thanked God mutely for that intervening table that had kept him from it, not for her sake, but for his.

"And you," he declared with savage rage—"and you believe this insolent accusation! I can see that!"

"I simply never thought whether I believed it or not," she replied with simplest truth. "I had no idea but to come quickly, that you might be warned."

"So you believed it. That was why you thought there was such life and death hurry. What a wife I have!"

What a husband she had! She did not say that: she was not thinking it. She was hardly capable of any thought.

He was not thinking either: he was blind to thought in his passion and fury.

"The people who saw you," he cried, "must have thought you mad, even though they knew nothing of your mother."

She had nothing to say, and she could not have

spoken, though her mouth were full of words: her beautiful lips trembled, and a hot flush came into her face, as she slowly raised her eyes to his. He was fool enough to think that the shame in her eyes was for herself, and it gave him a foul pleasure to see her suffering: he was at all events able to punish her for the news she had brought.

"Of course," he said, with a cold snarl, "*you are* mad yourself. I might have known it when you married me."

Her lips were manageable now, and she answered quietly:

"That is quite true."

She turned to the door and opened it for herself. Outside Von Storn was walking up and down.

"My dear lady," he said gently, "you look very ill. You are shaking with fever."

"Yes," she replied simply, "I feel ill. I have had fever often lately, and I suppose I have taken a chill."

Then she bowed and went on to her own room. Von Storn entered her husband's room, and said to himself when he saw him:

"He looks like a wild-beast. He *is* a beast, and not so clever as they think him. Pfah! what bad peasant blood, and it has been boiling over!"

Presently he said aloud:

"And you will go to England?"

"I must. No one else can do the special work there is to carry out there."

He found it hard to assume even the semblance of calmness, and was not master of his voice; perhaps that was why it carried a more boastful tone than he was used to allow himself. He was not looking at Von Storn, who noted the boast and smiled at it: he knew that his Government rarely relied for any important work on one man only.

"Anyway," he said coolly, "it is an order."

Selvaggio was aware that Von Storn was snubbing him for having bragged of his own indispensableness. He did not intend to tell him what he had learned from his wife. Von Storn might send a cipher message to Berlin that it was known he was a professional spy, and Berlin might think the services of a spy known as such to be of dubious value. Besides, he declared to himself, it was only that busy ass Euston, who thought everybody a spy, and had not been at all successful in persuading the British Foreign Office to take his views of things.

CHAPTER XLIII

JACQUELINE's maid, who was really a sensible woman, immediately perceived that her mistress was undoubtedly ill. It was true that the girl had had repeated, though slight, attacks of malarial fever, and she had now taken a serious chill.

Strong shivering fits shook her, and her teeth chattered audibly while Primmer was helping her to remove her soaked garments.

"Really, my lady," the woman said with decision, "you must not try to dress again, but get into bed, and I will pile on blankets. And I shall ring for hot-water bottles to put to you."

Jacqueline knew she could not dress again at present. Icy thrills, like the ebb and flow of freezing water, ran all over her. She crept shuddering into bed, and her limbs literally twitched with the paroxysms of shivering.

Primmer had already done as she said, and rung for the chambermaid. But now she would go and find her. In the corridor she met the woman, and also one of the guests, who, she had heard, was a famous English doctor. Acting on sheer impulse, she told him hastily how ill her lady was, and begged him to come to her.

He came at once. Jacqueline's absolutely drenched garments were still lying about, Primmer having had no time to take them away for drying. She explained quite briefly and clearly how several times quite lately her mistress had suffered from malarial attacks, and how she had come in more than half an hour ago soaked to the skin.

"Why did not the Countess change at once?"

"She had to see the Count—on some important business, I suppose."

With such information, and with the shaking, shuddering girl before him, Sir Lake Pool had not a difficult case to diagnose. Primmer, he was quite aware, had diagnosed it already.

"Hot-water bottles should be put all round the Countess; pile on light coverings, and let this prescription be made up at once. As soon as it arrives the Countess must take the draught."

At that moment Selvaggio came in. He did not try to conceal his surprise at the presence of Sir Lake Pool in his wife's room.

"My lady," Primmer explained hastily, "was so very ill I could scarcely get her wet things off, and I was going for hot-water bottles when I met Sir Lake just outside, and it came on me to beg him to see her ladyship."

"Of course you did quite right," said Selvaggio coldly, "but why did you not at once inform me?"

"I knew you were engaged, sir; and besides, her ladyship came straight from your study: I thought you must know. And it's hardly five minutes since Sir Lake came."

It was odd that Primmer should be incorrigible in calling her mistress, who disliked it, 'My lady,' and should never call her master 'My lord,' who would have liked it very well.

"How," asked Selvaggio, turning to the great doctor, "have you found the Countess?"

The tone of the inquiry was very cold, and it an-

noyed Sir Lake, who detected in it an accusation of officiousness.

"The Countess is obviously seriously ill," he replied stiffly. "But I need not tell you that: one need not be a doctor to see that. By the way," and he turned to Primmer, "that prescription must be made up quite at once."

"Could Köder take it to a chemist's in a cab, sir?" she asked, doubtfully, of her master.

"No; he is very busy. You must get one of the hotel servants to take it. It is necessary for us to return immediately to England." (Primmer looked up hurriedly.) "I was coming to tell the Countess."

Primmer went off with the prescription.

"Were you," asked Sir Lake in an undertone, "thinking of taking the Countess to England?"

"Certainly. Important family affairs call us both there."

"I need not tell you, however, now, that it will be quite impossible for her to travel to England at present."

"But a fever attack passes off in an hour or two."

"It often passes off in a few hours. But a patient would be running a risk in travelling to England from here immediately after such a recovery. And this attack may not pass off in a few hours. I must warn you that my opinion is that the Countess could undertake no such journey for several days to come,

She may quite possibly have to remain in bed for several days."

"I, at all events, must leave in two hours."

Concerning that the doctor could express no opinion. He contrived to show that it did not concern him. Selvaggio had thoroughly irritated him by his manner.

After all, Selvaggio was not sure that he was sorry at being obliged to go alone. The long journey *tête-à-tête* with her, as things were, would have been unpleasant enough, and he had so much to fill his mind.

"Yes," he said, "of course it is out of the question for the Countess to travel at present."

The doctor bowed, and said in a low voice:

"I have no wish to alarm you, Count Selvaggio" (whereat his hearer looked at him with sudden suspicion), "but it is quite possible the Countess may have a serious illness. I cannot say yet. No one could say. Your urgent affairs call you away to England. Is there anyone——"

"Of course the Countess's maid will stay with her."

Again Sir Lake Pool bowed.

"She seems," he said, "a capable and trustworthy woman."

"Oh yes. And she has been with her mistress for several years. A family servant, you understand?"

"I quite understand."

Selvaggio, who was full of affairs, and had much to do before leaving, thought the doctor intolerably tedious.

("These fellows," he said to himself, "like to make storms in teacups. Probably Jacqueline's illness will be nothing; but they like to make a case, and especially when the patient is a person of rank and consequence.")

On his side Sir Lake Pool thought his patient's husband was taking the matter with some nonchalance. He knew all about the big world, and was quite aware that, though they had been married several months, Count and Countess Selvaggio were still on their wedding tour, and it seemed to him queer that the man should take so coolly the idea of leaving his wife alone in a foreign hotel with only a lady's-maid to attend to her.

"If," he observed, "the Countess's illness should *not* pass away in a few hours, of which you are so sanguine, I should have to send in a regular nurse. The Blue Nuns are extremely efficient, all certificated nurses, and they are mostly English."

"By all means engage one the moment you think it advisable. I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me. I have important business to arrange before leaving."

Again Sir Lake Pool bowed.

"I would like," he said, "to wait here myself un-

til I have seen the Countess take the medicine I have ordered, and observed its effect. The effect might be quite soon observable."

"I will telegraph for news as soon as I reach England. I shall hope to hear excellent reports."

CHAPTER XLIV

WHEN Mr. Euston heard that Count Selvaggio had left suddenly for England he felt some relief, for he had been not a little apprehensive of a "rum-pus." It would have been very unpleasant if the man should have attempted any violent assault, for the distinguished Member of Parliament was not at all a good man with his fists; and for his name to figure in newspaper reports of a row in a foreign hotel would have been most disagreeable.

From relief he passed to complacence.

"By George! the fellow has run away," he declared to himself. "His wife ran and told him what I said: and finding himself blown upon he has made tracks. And he has fled alone. That pretty well proves it. He wants to travel without impedimenta, and it's easier to cover up one's tracks when one hasn't a lady and her maid in tow."

Miss Talacre was pretty sure that this theory was correct, and she insinuated that Mr. Euston was a public benefactor and a hero: in which idea that gentleman was much disposed to agree with

her. She scouted the idea of Jacqueline's illness, which was soon reported to be serious.

"Of course they quarrelled," she stated with strong conviction, "and she refused to go with him. Or," with quite equal conviction, "she is in with him, and stays behind to let him get off more easily, as you say. Probably she has to see his accomplices and so forth, and keep him informed by code telegrams how the wind blows."

Miss Talacre was really enjoying herself very much. She had not expected anything half so interesting: churches and pictures and statues bored her frightfully. And here she was on the fringe of a regular drama—perhaps a tragedy: why should not this spy be caught and shot?"

"I really think," she said in awed tones, "that you, Mr. Euston, ought to communicate with the Foreign Office—or Scotland Yard."

"Oh," replied Mr. Euston with an air, "I should never touch police business."

"No, no! of course not, I see. But the Foreign Office. In cipher, you know. It *ought* to know."

Mr. Euston did not think it necessary to explain that there was no secret code in use by our Foreign Office the knowledge of which he shared with it.

Still, he felt that Miss Talacre was a sensible young woman, and she was certainly more impressed by his consequence and capacity for *haute politique* than he was accustomed to find people.

It happened that the British Consul here was an old schoolfellow of his on whom he had not yet called; and the afternoon turning fine, he went to see him.

"Hulloa, Euston! glad to see you. There is big news that may have bigger results. I have just heard that Austria puts the screw on Serbia over the assassination of the Archduke and his wife—I suppose everyone will know in an hour or two. What will come of it? It may mean wigs on the green all round."

"Servia can't hold up against Austria."

"Of course not: not alone. But Austria must know she won't be left alone; Russia will not see Servia scrunched, and Austria knows it too well to try unless *she* has somebody behind *her*."

Presently Euston, feeling the air full of large matters, told his own story, which he made as large as possible.

His friend listened as one who was being entertained by the tale of a mare's nest. But he did listen very carefully. He knew a good deal about Von Storn, and he also knew that the German Consul and Selvaggio had been constantly meeting, and that Selvaggio had many more visitors (about whom, again, he knew or suspected things) than an ordinary tourist was in the habit of receiving with strictest privacy. Finally, he was aware of Selvaggio's voluminous correspondence, and that much of

it came addressed, in the first instance, to the German Consulate.

That Euston was a duffer his old schoolfellow had always taken for granted; nevertheless——

At that moment, Sir Lake Pool was announced, who came to consult the representative of Great Britain on a purely private matter concerning circular notes.

"My little business," the great doctor, who was extremely direct, explained, "will probably hardly take you five minutes. If I were not a very bad linguist I should not have to trouble you at all. But as it is dull and personal, I will not trouble Mr. Euston also with it."

Mr. Euston took his leave, and it was the case that in five minutes Sir Lake's small difficulty was adjusted.

"I hear," remarked the Consul, "that you have an English patient at the Hotel Regina."

"Yes; Countess Selvaggio. She is English in spite of her name. Sir Jeremy Joscelyn's daughter."

"And Lady Adelgitha de Bohun's—I mean Lady Adelgitha Joscelyn's. Euston says she is dangerously ill."

"Seriously ill, certainly." Sir Lake was now just a trifle stiff, not being used to talk about his cases.

"Her husband must be anxious. Bride and bridegroom, I believe."

Sir Lake merely bowed assent to the latter statement.

"Euston swears he has gone off to England; but Euston gets hold of all sorts of tales."

"It is true, however, that Count Selvaggio left for England by the 1.35 train."

"A pretty cool bridegroom! But perhaps he *had* to go."

"He stated that the business which called him away was imperative. I had had to warn him that his wife's illness might become serious—as it has."

When Sir Lake left him, the Consul did send a telegram in cipher to the British Foreign Office. Decoded, it would read:

"Count Selvaggio left here very abruptly for England to-day by train departing 1.35 p.m. He left his wife, suddenly attacked by serious illness after having overheard him spoken of as paid spy. He is German, and his relations with German Consul and secret agents here have been intimate. Excuse this if worthless information."

CHAPTER XLV

"SIR LAKE," inquired Primmer on the day following Selvaggio's departure, "do you not think I should inform the Countess's family of her illness?"

"Yes, I think you ought. And I think you should let them know that the Count is not here."

This Primmer did, telegraphing to Sir Jeremy Joscelyn, who, after consultation with Berengaria, who was ill herself, left as soon as possible for Italy. In passing through London he called at the Foreign Office, asking for a Secretary personally known to him.

"One never," he explained, "used to bother about passports; but as things are, perhaps they may be useful."

"I believe you will find them quite essential. I hope you may find your daughter better. If she should be well enough, I should advise you to bring her home at once. Travelling may become complicated."

"It is very odd. Her husband is not with her. He left the very day she was taken ill, *after* she was taken ill."

"On their wedding journey, too!"

"Well, they have been married four months; still—yes, it was their wedding journey. I wonder—we have had no telegram or anything announcing his arrival in England."

"Oh, as to that I can relieve your anxiety. I happen to know he reached England quite safely."

"I must say I think it most negligent of him not to let us know. The fact is——"

"Yes?"

"He is—queer. We do not care much for him. We none of us desired the marriage—you're an old

friend, and I don't mind saying it to you. A girl of her rank and—er—wealth——”

“And beauty!”

“Well, yes. Our girl had a right, we had a right for her, to look for a different sort of marriage. You see, no one knew anything about him.”

“Oh, come, Joscelyn, I think that an exaggeration! Foreigners of any mark are mostly known to us here, and I assure you Count Selvaggio is by no means unknown to us. He has great capacity and great energy. Ah! here are the passports. You will find them all right, and quite necessary nowadays.”

The Secretary rose, and made a feint of not looking at the clock.

“Yes,” he said, when the clerk who brought the passports had gone out, “Selvaggio is not—inconsiderable. I fancy his own Government thinks a good deal of his capacity.”

“The Italian Government?”

“No, no! The German Government.”

“German Government! Selvaggio a German!”

“Yes; my dear fellow, I thought you must know. Perhaps, however—you see, his birth is not so illustrious as his talents; rather below par, I fancy—perhaps he was rather shy of your knowing his very bourgeois German name, and preferred to sink it in his title—quite a real old title attached to land in Sicily he bought some years ago. *Must* you go?

Well, if you are to cross to-day I dare say you ought to be moving. I do hope you will find no cause for anxiety when you get out there."

Now, this Secretary was habitually by no means garrulous: perhaps he had a reason for all he had said; perhaps he thought:

"They must all know soon. It's as well to prepare them a bit."

Almost at the threshold of the Foreign Office Sir Jeremy met Lady Louisa Raffham and Lord Helmstone. He told them his news.

"Jacqueline very ill, and you going out to Italy to look after her! But can't her husband look after her?" said Lady Louisa, with unveiled surprise.

"He is in England. Poor Berengaria is laid up, and there could be no question of her going as she is, even if she could leave Adelgitha."

"Look here," said Lady Louisa, who could be both kind and energetic, "Jacqueline ought to have some woman with her. Oh, I know she has her maid; but that isn't enough. I'll tell you what: I shall go with you."

Sir Jeremy was both grateful and pleased, for his girl's sake and his own. He hated the idea of the solitary journey to Italy.

"Why," asked Helmstone quietly, "should not I go with you both?"

His aunt shook her head slightly, which Sir Jere-

my did not see and Helmstone did not choose to see.

"Travelling just now," he said, "isn't like ordinary holiday travelling. There may be plenty of difficulties. You had better let me come."

Sir Jeremy saw no objection at all, and Lady Louisa, who did, was not serious enough to insist. The prospect of a long journey *tête-à-tête* with her brother-in-law did not entrance her.

"I may as well go in and get our passports at once," Helmstone remarked, as if it were now settled. "And you can go home and get your things packed."

They then arranged their rendezvous, and parted for the time.

CHAPTER XLVI

WHEN her father and his companions arrived they found Sir Lake Pool was in Jacqueline's room. Primmer immediately brought him to them in the drawing-room.

"I am Sir Jeremy Joscelyn, your patient's father; and this is my sister-in-law, Lady Louisa Raffham—her nephew, Lord Helmstone."

"I am very glad you have come. The Countess is seriously ill, and I am relieved that members of her family should be with her. I myself must return to England, and should have done so yester-

day but that I wished you to be here before I left my patient. Her maid is excellent, and we have two first-rate nurses, a night nurse and a day—Blue Sisters. But I did not like the idea of your daughter being ill here with no member of her family at hand."

Sir Jeremy expressed his gratitude very cordially.

"And is there," he then asked, "any other English doctor here?"

"Yes, a very good one. He lives here. I called him in, and he thoroughly understands the case."

"You have kept Count Selvaggio informed," inquired Sir Jeremy, "of your patient's state?"

"He has telegraphed several times, and I sent bulletins in reply, to his club. His messages bore no special address, but your daughter's maid knew his club."

"He was called away to England just before his wife was taken ill?" asked Lady Louisa. She perceived that the doctor spoke stiffly about Selvaggio.

"He left just *after* she was taken ill."

"If I had been you, I should't have let him go."

Sir Lake Pool thought that nonsense, and smiled coolly.

"I explained that the Countess's illness might easily develop as it *has* developed. But his summons to England was, he said, imperative. He was at first even reluctant to admit the impossibility of the Countess accompanying him."

Later on Lady Louisa said to her nephew:

"There's something queer about it. It was a monstrous thing to go off and leave her alone here."

"A damnable thing!" said Helmstone bitterly.

"What business on earth could he have that was so imperative?"

"God knows! He was always a secret sort of chap, and no one knew what his business was. Loody, I wish to Heaven I had never brought him down to Wildspur!"

"Yes. But that milk is spilt. Did you notice how uncomfortable her father was whenever I talked about Selvaggio?"

"He was probably cursing the fellow in his heart."

"As you are in yours!"

"I curse him out loud. Loody! I curse myself too. I had heard queer things, and I didn't want to gossip. What decent fellow does gossip? Besides, she was up in arms for him always, and I could only seem to be making mischief out of jealousy."

"You could have done no good. She was determined to marry him; if you had told her he was a murderer, she would not have believed."

"Well, he isn't a murderer—that I know of. All I could say was that no one knew who or what he was, or what he did, and that there were stupid rumours."

"What rumours?"

"That he—— But what's the good? The mischief is done. What good could it do now for me to spread tales about her husband?"

"Telling me isn't spreading."

"Yes, it is. I wish he was damned!"

"He must be dead first. And he is not the sort to die off to oblige the public."

During those days of Jacqueline's illness the affairs of the great world moved quickly. England was at war with Germany before Lady Louisa was allowed to speak to the girl. And Helmstone had come to his aunt and said:

"Loody, I must go home."

She knew how reluctantly he would leave the place where Jacqueline was; but there was nothing to say, and all along she had known his coming to be foolish.

Telegrams had continued for a time to arrive from Selvaggio, but they came more and more irregularly, and had now ceased to come at all.

A few days after the declaration of war, and Helmstone's departure, Lady Louisa received a note from the British Consul. He asked if she could come and see him, apologizing for not coming to her, but saying that he wished to see her without Sir Jeremy Joscelyn's knowledge.

"I have," he told her, when she was seated in his private sitting-room, "something very serious to tell you, Lady Louisa. It doesn't personally con-

cern you, but I know you are Sir Jeremy's sister-in-law, and it does concern him, as very terribly concerning his daughter."

"Does it relate to her husband?"

"Yes. He went from hence charged with important Secret Service business in England on behalf of the German Government—his own Government."

"You mean that he is a German?"

"Undoubtedly. He has been a Secret Service Agent of the German Government for many years—in many places: here among others. But for some time past his energies have been centred chiefly in England; and it is ascertained that his services to Germany have been very great, and of a most dangerous nature to our country. On his late journey thither he was shadowed—from Rome onwards. He held many interviews, even *en route*, with known German agents, and it seems he handed papers to each. Yet his journey was rapid; no doubt the men whom he seemed casually to meet on platforms, where the express stopped, had been instructed to be there for him. In England he was never lost sight of, though he doubled often; finally he was arrested, and such documents were found upon him, plans, coded descriptions of places, and statements as to numbers, disposition, and destination of troops, that his case was hopeless."

For a moment the Consul paused; his manner

was very grave and not very compassionate. He was not speaking to a near relation of the spy, and he had no special occasion for assuming an air of pity.

"Hopeless," he repeated. "In such an extreme case the fate of a spy, caught red-handed in war-time, must be hopeless. He was tried yesterday, and——"

"Executed!" cried Lady Louisa.

"This morning. There has been, and will be, no publication of the case in the Press. It may not leak out to the public at all. But that is another matter, and who can say? I took the liberty of sending for you because Sir Jeremy should be informed, but you can decide how and when. Later on you must decide between you if and when his daughter is to be told. From what we now know, and from what I knew of the man before, her loss is more tragic than great."

CHAPTER XLVII

As Lady Louisa returned to the hotel her first thought was, "What a pity Helmstone isn't here!" Her second that it was as well he had gone. It would not be well that he should be on the spot when Jacqueline first learnt what, of course, she must be told.

Then came the realization that she herself had

rather a trying duty to perform. For great delicacy of feeling she did not give her brother-in-law credit; he would feel as little on the occasion as any gentleman of her acquaintance she could think of. And he had no affection for his daughter's husband, to be grieved by her tragic news. Still, it is a trying announcement to have to make to a gentleman of position that his son-in-law has been executed as a spy, and Lady Louisa did not accuse Sir Jeremy of being so selfish that he could hear without horror what must so terribly affect his daughter, still almost a bride.

Sir Jeremy did, in fact, hear what she had to tell him very much as she had imagined he would. His was none of those complex and intricate characters which disconcert you by surprises and revelations of the unexpected.

For Jacqueline he was horrified, and he was taken aback; he was surprised, and declared that he was not surprised at all; the dark utterances of his friend at the Foreign Office had prepared him: which they had not a bit. It was a shocking disgrace, but no one need know of it, so it was not a disgrace, but only a terrible misfortune; and, as the marriage was every way unfit, and bound to have involved Jacqueline in lifelong wretchedness, the speedy dissolution of it could not be regarded as anything but a blessing in disguise. She must suffer grievously, and here her father winced at

the anticipation of being the close spectator of her anguish; for he liked to see people around him pleasant and comfortable, and for many years, poor man, he had been obliged pretty often to do without that satisfaction. But Jacqueline was very young, and she would outlive her pain—he was afraid it would take a long time.

"You see (I could never understand her taste), she was so very much in love with him."

"I'm not so sure of that. She was bewitched, and she was obstinate. But" (Lady Louisa was on the point of quoting Helmstone's opinion, but changed her mind and gave only her own), "I don't believe she was really in love with him. It was a delusion—what people call an obsession."

"Louisa, I wish you had never had him at Wildspur!"

"So do I. . . . But, Jeremy, you may be sure much happened during their long tour abroad of which we know nothing. There must have been something queer about their parting. I can see that from Primmer's way of alluding to him. And from the time Jacqueline ceased to wander in her mind she has never said a word about his absence."

There was other news to disquiet Sir Jeremy: Berengaria's illness had not passed off, but had become more serious. Amelia Graystock was at Boon Court, and wrote in a vein of apprehension that she could not conceal. The spectacle of serious illness

worried and tried her, and she had always sincerely loved Berengaria. For Adelgitha she had never cared a great deal, and she was now thrown into the uninterrupted society of Adelgitha, who was frightened, querulous, and cross. To Sir Jeremy, strange to say, Lady Adelgitha wrote quite often, and very civilly, as to a gentleman who took a strong, if unaccountable, personal interest in the family. Her letters were not at all flighty, or incoherent; they were rather short, and gave very lucid accounts of the doctor's opinion, and brief, complaining statements of her own loneliness and anxiety. To Jacqueline she made very slight allusion, supposing she must be rapidly approaching convalescence. To 'Your sister-in-law, Lady Louisa,' she sent her compliments. 'Your daughter's brother arrived here from the Continent the day after you left. His French is improved. But a young man is not very useful in a sick house.'

Of course Frederick wrote himself. He was more troubled by the illness of Berengaria, which he could see, than by that of his sister, which he could not, and for Berengaria he really had a son's affection: he had experienced her mother-love all his life. She was more to him than father or sister. And then he had a strong sense that, whereas Berengaria had deserved only all that was good, Jacqueline's troubles had been brought on her by her own obstinate wrong-doing. Of course, he knew

Selvaggio was not with his wife, and he scented a quarrel, perhaps a final rupture. She must suffer in either case, but she need have had no such suffering if she had not been wilful and, as he thought, wicked. As to her illness, of course she would get well. He had no such comfortable assurance as to Berengaria.

One day Jacqueline quite suddenly turned to her father, who was sitting by her side. She herself was out of bed, not for the first time, and was sitting up in a big chair near the open window.

"Father," she asked in a low voice, "have you heard from my husband?"

Sir Jeremy nerved himself as well as he could, and tried not to wish Lady Louisa were there instead of himself.

"He telegraphed to inquire as to your state—quite regularly at first."

"Did he write? Are there any letters for me—from him?"

"No, my dear. He only telegraphed, to Primer or Sir Lake."

She asked no more questions for several minutes, and her father hoped there would be no more. I am afraid he was wondering how he could escape out of the room. But presently she turned to him with another inquiry.

"You said 'at first.' Has he not even telegraphed lately?"

"Not lately, my dear. But you must remember things are all upset. There is war going on, and letters and telegrams are not the simple things they were."

"But you get letters from Boon?"

"Oh yes, my dear. Your Aunt Berengaria is not very well, Amelia Graystock writes—she is staying there. And so does Frederick. And your mamma too."

Jacqueline had never heard of her mother writing letters: a faint hope brought a faint colour into her face.

"To me, papa? Does she ever write to me?"

"No, my dear. Not to you. She knows you are not fit for correspondence."

"I should love to get a letter from her," the girl almost whispered. She had never had a letter from her mother in her life.

She paused so long that Sir Jeremy thought she would say no more about her husband. But she did.

"Father," she said, "I wish Netto had written. I wish he had written to *me*. . . ."

"But, my dear, he knew you were not able to receive letters. You were delirious. . . ."

"Yes; but I wish he had written. Father, he was very angry with me when he went away."

"Then," said Sir Jeremy stoutly, getting suddenly red in the face, "I am sure he was most unjust."

"I cannot tell. I do not know what I should have done. What I did he thought wrong, and he was angry. I should like him to have written."

Her father saw how troubled she was, and said, rather heedlessly of what he might be bringing on himself:

"My dear, no doubt he would have written—later. But—but he met with an accident, and that would prevent him."

"An accident? Was he injured?"

"Yes—yes, my dear. I did not mean to tell you yet."

But Jacqueline had turned to look at her father, and she read more in his face than he imagined.

"A serious accident?" she asked, with wide, fearful eyes that Sir Jeremy could not meet with his.

"I'm afraid so," he stammered, staring down into the white, sunlit piazza.

"Please tell me the truth. . . ." She paused, and Sir Jeremy kept silence. "I think I guess the truth. That was why he never wrote. Father!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Was he—killed?"

Sir Jeremy could not see her terrible pallor, for he could not look at her. He felt utterly wretched, too absolutely worried and driven to know what was best to say.

"Please tell me the truth. Was he killed?"

"My dear, yes; the accident was fatal."

There was no wild outcry of anguish from the girl, hardly silence, for almost at once she asked earnestly:

"Did he suffer much?"

"Not at all, I believe. Death must have been instantaneous. There could have been no suffering."

The pause now was much longer. But it had its end, and Jacqueline put another question.

"You must tell me—what was the accident?"

"Jacqueline, I cannot."

"You do not know? But you must know: you must have been told. You must tell me."

He really thought he *could* not. She watched him, and saw that it was so. Yet she *must* know.

"Father," she said, "before he went away I told him something. I gave him a warning. That was what made him angry——"

"Angry! If he had valued the warning he might have been alive now."

"You mean that the—the accident befell him because he did not take my warning. Then I think I know. But you must tell me. Where was he?"

"I do not know."

"Ah! In England?"

"Yes, it happened in England."

"Yet you do not know where!"

"I was not told: only that he was dead."

"Then I know. Dead! You mean killed?"

He barely bent his head, did not know that he had bent it. But her eyes had never left him, and she saw.

"It was not," she said, "by accident that he was killed? He was killed intentionally."

"My dear," Sir Jeremy stammered, "he wasn't *murdered*. . . ."

"I do not know what they call murder. I suppose they called it justice. He was my husband."

So she had told herself; she had not been told by her father after all, because she was stronger than he.

"He was my husband," she said again. "The husband I chose. I wish I had not made him angry."

She had a great heart, and therefore her father, who was shallow-hearted, could not understand her, and therefore her husband, who had no heart at all, but only eyes, and tastes, and ears, could not understand her, though he flattered himself that he read her like a little easy book. When she had gone tearing back through the horrible cold rain to warn him, she had never thought of his guilt at all, or considered it, or weighed it; treachery, and such a life as his, paid spying, and a living lie all day and every day, were the things most loathsome to her nature; but she had not considered them. Her whole mind was engulfed in the thought of his dan-

ger. And he had hated her for her warning because it told him he was found out.

"He was my husband. I wish I had not made him angry."

She condemned herself altogether. Perhaps his anger had blinded him to his danger. She must have done wrong, and she was sure she had wronged him in marrying him. If he had married a woman who really loved him, who had known what that sort of love meant, her love would have given her instinct, and he himself would have been different: he would have turned from the absorption of his 'business' to the greater absorption of real love, and been saved. She, Jacqueline herself, had been nothing to his life, only a by-play of his idler time, as a theatre might be. And for this the girl did not accuse him, but herself. How could he love her who had found, almost instantly on marriage, that she did not love him? He must have been conscious that marriage was repugnant to her. She had done him great injury. There are those who do wrong very easily, and do not repent at all. Jacqueline did wrong often and repentance came swiftly, because, though wilful, she was strangely humble and of a rare truth and sincerity.

She was so sincere that even now, in her black horror of repentance, she knew that for one thing she could only feel relief—relief from the horrible

degradation of marriage without love, as impure, she thought, as love without marriage.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THEY were taking Jacqueline home to Boon Court. She was three weeks older than when she first knew herself a widow. Her father, Lady Louisa, and Primmer were taking her home. But she was scarcely an invalid. Her constitution was admirable, like that of both her parents. Berengaria had always had a bad one; Adelgitha had hardly known what sickness meant: she had a never-failing appetite, and all food seemed to agree with her, and her sleep was regular, long, and untroubled. Berengaria had always been sickly, almost disliking eating, and seldom eating with appetite; she could hardly digest any sort of food, and her sleep was brief and irregular, and often full of almost conscious worry and distress. She had a weak circulation of blood, and a low vitality, and for the attack of such an illness as this she had no reserve of strength.

"No vitality, no vitality at all, Miss Graystock," the doctors would agree. "There is our difficulty. There is the ground of our anxiety."

"Ah, Frederick! Is that you?" said Berengaria; and her hand went out to caress his as he sat down

by her bed. Her eyes had never had any beauty, but the light of love in them was beautiful.

"You have suddenly turned from a lad into a young man." She had often told him this with pride and pleasure. He had a fine figure, and his face was handsome, though without fine expression. The expression of affection it bore now was that for which Berengaria cared most."

"You have always been a good, good son to me."

"Not nearly so good as you have deserved. If I were perfect I should not be good enough."

"It is not easy to be perfect," the old maid said gently. She was thinking, with mute self-reproach, of Jacqueline. She knew she had loved better the boy who did not belong to her than the girl who did. She knew it now and was ashamed. But she loved both, and was hungry to see her before they could see each other no more. Jacqueline was sorely stricken, and Berengaria longed to clasp the sad child to her heart. She wanted to see her brother-in-law too. Him also she loved. He was the father of her boy and girl: and he and she had sat at the same hearth and the same board for many, many years. All that was near to her must be dear; that was in her constant, loyal nature. In all these years she had never told herself that he was a shallow, somewhat foolish man. He was a man of good, irreproachable life, and she could respect him, and did.

"They are on their way?" she said, as she had said many times.

"Yes. They are getting near home. They may be in England even—or just about to cross. The last telegram was from Paris, and it took some time to reach us. They were to cross from Dieppe—perhaps another telegram may come to-morrow morning from there; the office is closed for to-night."

"Freddy!"

"Yes, dear."

"You will be very gentle to Jacqueline? I can hardly realize the full sadness of it all. A widow—at her age."

"And the widow of such a man!"

"And widowed in such awful circumstances. God comfort her! And for us, we must be very gentle and careful. I do not suppose that she will let us *say* anything."

"There is nothing to be said."

"But you will be gentle with her?"

"Yes, I promise. Her wilful marriage has brought disgrace, but that cannot be altered now. And, Aunt Berengaria—it is hard to think that the disgrace should come on this home through my father's daughter and my sister."

Perhaps Berengaria did not remember that another wilful marriage had made Jacqueline his

father's daughter. But she was troubled because the lad's tone sounded harsh.

"Yes, she is your sister—your only sister. You will remember that?"

"Oh yes, I will. I do. And I have a brother's fondness for her. I don't think she is very fond of me."

"Yes, dear, she is; only your opposition to that wretched man divided you."

"And was not my opposition just and right? Did not you share it? She had a grudge against me because I did not choose to see her life ruined and disgraced, and it is ruined and disgraced."

"No, Freddy. She is not disgraced——"

"Her life is. I said her life."

"As for ruin, God can build up ruins. He is always doing it. Freddy, I think I shall last till they come. If not, will you tell her from me all my love and tenderness for her?"

Did the dying creature realize that thus she could best arrange that only loving words and tender should greet the girl if she should come too late?

He promised, but, with a sudden thrust of compunction, added:

"No words I could find would do justice to your tenderness and love. Tell me what to say."

"Nay, dear. Ask God: He will put the words in your heart if you ask, and then you will find them in your mouth."

Thus she tried, gently and humbly, to teach a last lesson of forbearance and patience. He learnt it. He had always liked his own words and ideas; to fulfil this sacred charge he would not trust them, but would lay them aside, and listen to what God might put in his heart.

They did not come in time—not in time to hear any words for themselves from Berengaria's lips. She was alive when they arrived, and was alive as they knelt about her bed, but in an entire unconsciousness. For one instant she opened her eyes before the end—half an hour before the end; but, as she lay, they fell on no one but Lady Louisa.

"How kind!" she murmured, and the failing eyes closed again and opened on this world no more. She did not see Jacqueline, nor her father, nor Frederick, nor Adelgitha, nor Amelia. Her message for Jacqueline she had entrusted to the Friend Whom she saw next, and He gave it.

When the girl knelt alone, late that night, by that peaceful sleeper, she said in her heart:

"What would she have said to me if she could have told me? Tell me. You know. You will not keep it from me, because her mouth is closed."

And He told her instantly:

"That which was in her heart all through was in it to the last. But she would leave no injunction. To Me she left that—for reverence."

"I know," the widowed child answered—"I

know what was in her heart always, and must have been most at the end. My mother. She has lost everything in her loss. I can be nothing, but that nothing I will be. Help me!"

She knew as well as ever that her mother disliked, detested her. But she would be her servant. She had said that, with her complete knowledge of her mother's dislike of and repulsion towards her, she could not live at home. But the care of her mother should take the place of home. Others, less faulty, had no home under the sky: what right had she to claim a real home? Home is the sanctuary of duties rather than of pleasures. Here duty was plain. This time she fell into no mistake, and in her superhuman task God stood by her, and she remained faithful. She only counted on pain in it, and the pain came, and stayed, but she kept her place and her brave purpose. After all, she had a great heart: and for its waywardness and silliness God did not flout it. Folly as well as sin He can forgive.

CHAPTER XLIX

SHE had a purpose in life, and the centre of its gravity lay outside herself, as the noblest purposes in life do lie. She had no illusions, and did not turn to this purpose with any hope that her mother would come to love her. She never did. Adelgitha held her to be socially inferior, and showed it al-

ways: she accepted her as an attendant, a servant, only. But the servant's attendance became indispensable.

Adelgitha held the girl responsible for Berengaria's death, and never weakened in her resentment, or faltered in her pitiless expression of it.

"Beggars on horseback!" she would sneer. "My sister, Lady Berengaria, took you out of your place, and you rewarded her by breaking her heart. I suppose you are content. Arrange these cushions, and adjust the light properly. Then read to me. You can read quite well. You have the intonation of a lady: you picked it up from your benefactress. How much longer do you intend wearing black? I hate it! But Lady Berengaria was my sister. Complimentary mourning, yours is, and you need not wear it for ever. My sister has been dead close on a year. The other servants will go out of mourning next month."

Sir Jeremy entered the room while she was speaking, and his feeling for his girl galled him to revolt.

"Adelgitha," he expostulated, "Jacqueline is in mourning for her husband. And she is not your servant."

"'Adelgitha!' How dare you call me that? You would not have dared if Lady Berengaria had been alive. And Jacqueline is my servant. What is a *dame de compagnie*, after all, but a servant? And

she does things for me that I should not dream of asking my maid to do. She knows her place; if not, I will teach her. Her husband! Who ever heard of one's attendant wearing mourning if one didn't happen to be in mourning oneself? It seems you are a Radical, a leveller."

Jacqueline herself never dared to call her 'mother,' and never attempted the least caress. She accepted the trumpery gifts given to her, when her mother was in her more urbane moods, such gifts as the lady's-maid would not have taken. She laid them by as if they were love-gifts and sacred. She had no other relics. Very soon after her return she came to her father in his study and put into his hand a parcel.

"It contains," she said in her steady, simple voice, "the jewels he gave me at our marriage. Could you send them to London and have them sold? Do not tell me for how much, but send the money to the nuns where I was—they are not rich, and they are very charitable. Ask them to pray for his soul."

Her father promised to do what she asked, and his manner was very kind.

"I will take them to London myself," he said. "I think that will be best."

"Then," she added, after a moment's thought, "if you do that I will ask you to do something else. You will know where to go. Find out where—"

where that accident happened; and try to find out if he saw any priest before he died. Will you, please? There must be some chaplain or visiting priest attached to such a place."

This also Sir Jeremy promised, and he carried out his undertaking. Selvaggio had seen a priest, and the priest asked Sir Jeremy if his daughter would like to see him. He would come willingly. She said 'Yes'; and the priest came down.

"Did he give you," she asked quietly, "any message for me?"

"No; he did not mention that he was married. He did not let me stay with him long, and our talk was about religion."

"Did he go to confession?"

"Yes. I'm afraid I can't tell you much more, because he did not say much. He just let me come to him, and he went to Confession: that was nearly all."

"Thank you. You see, I had offended him. I should like him to have forgiven me."

"No doubt he forgave all whom he thought guilty of offence against him. I dare say he would have sent you a message had he thought we should ever meet or have any communication."

"Will you do something for me? It will give you some trouble."

"I should not do it the less willingly if the trouble were great."

He was a very kind man, this priest, quite young, and full of a pity that was like reverence.

"It is this: I want to cause many Masses to be said for his soul. There must be many very poor priests in London: could you find some of them out for me, and ask them to say each of them so many Masses for him? And give each his proportion of the alms I offer. Perhaps you would say as many as you can yourself; if you cannot say any, then give the offering to the others. You understand that I do not wish *any* of them to know my husband's name: say the Masses are for the soul of one who died in a dreadful manner."

The sum she handed to him seemed to the young priest very great.

"Would it not be better," he asked, "to do this through some Bishop?"

"No. Unless you are unwilling to do it."

"I am not at all unwilling."

"Then I thank you very much. My idea in seeking out priests who are poor is that thus, perhaps, a little help may come to them out of a great tragedy. You know what is usually offered when one asks that a Mass may be said—I want each priest to receive for each Mass he says, four times that offering."

CHAPTER L

IT now annoyed Lady Adelgitha that Jacqueline should have a maid of her own.

"A *dame de compagnie* with a lady's maid!" she scoffed. "The coachman will be starting his Master of the Horse!"

This remark was made to her own maid, who necessarily repeated it to Primmer. Primmer was indignant. Her own mistress's condition of 'black slavery,' and the return it met, kept her in a chronic state of angry protest. To Jacqueline herself she durst say nothing, but in the housekeeper's room her eloquence was vitriolic.

One day Adelgitha turned abruptly to Jacqueline and demanded:

"Is that woman you keep about you a poor relation? There must be *some* explanation. The position is comic. An attendant's lady's maid!"

"No. She——"

"'No' *tout court!* Manners, miss!"

"No, Lady Adelgitha. She is no relation of mine. She was *my* attendant; you see, I needed one when I was ill. She was very devoted."

"But you're not ill now. I should call your health brutal. 'Devoted': she seems infatuated. Not a poor relation? She might be your mother, to see her *empressement*."

Certainly Primmer could easily show more moth-

erly devotion than her mistress's own mother did.

"I should not like," Jacqueline said in a low, troubled voice, "to send her away. I think it would be unjust and cruel. But if her being here annoys you——"

"My good girl! If her presence here annoyed me I should send her away. Are you going to talk of dismissing servants from the house of which I am mistress? Since Lady Berengaria's death (whose mistaken kindness completely spoiled you) you will recollect I am mistress here."

It was a long time after this that, late one afternoon, a footman came to Jacqueline and said:

"Her ladyship sends her compliments, ma'am, and begs you would be good enough to go to her."

The message had originally been entrusted to Lady Adelgitha's own maid, and had been expressed thus:

"Morley, ring: and tell whoever comes to send that girl here. Don't go yourself."

Morley, on the bell being answered, had slipped downstairs and given the message to the footman as Jacqueline received it. She obeyed at once.

"I have sent for you," her mother began at once, "to find serious fault. (You needn't go, Morley; for it would apply to you too if *you* misconducted yourself.) I do not allow followers. And you have been encouraging one."

Jacqueline blushed redly, and Adelgitha went on ruthlessly:

"Ah, ah! Your withers are wrung. I saw him come and I saw him go. A gay spark! He used to come before, when dear Lady Berengaria was alive: she was weakly indulgent. He came with that Solfaggio fellow. And now he comes again. But I will have no followers; you see, I'm plain with you, miss. You can go now. I do not require you at present. Do not count on my blindness, for I notice *everything*."

In the housekeeper's room that evening this also was repeated. And Primmer blazed out:

"The simple truth is it's a sin not to shut your lady up, Miss Morley. She's a vampire, and the pleasure of *her* life is to suck the blood of my poor young lady's life. It is just horrible, ghastly! It passes *me* that Sir Jeremy can look on and see it. He must be as mad as his wife."

Now, oddly enough, overt recognition of Lady Adelgitha's madness was never made in speech in the housekeeper's room. It was tacitly taken for granted, but never frankly confessed aloud.

"Hush, my dear Miss Primmer—hush!" the housekeeper exclaimed, much scandalized; and the butler and Sir Jeremy's valet shook their heads. Morley was offended.

"Well," she remarked tartly, "I just told you what my lady said. It wasn't me that passed the

remark. Lord Helmstone or Lord Tomnoddy's welcome to come here for all I care. I just repeated what her ladyship said. And" (softening) "you don't suppose I defend it. It was *shocking* to hear her, and, as for looking at the Countess, I couldn't—I could no more tell you what she looked like! I kep' my face on her ladyship's, and she might have seen I was shocked—but it's the truth she *likes* to see any person look shocked. It makes her feel powerful, and that's all she cares for. 'You can't say out just what you like,' is her idea—'I can.' So the more shocked any person looks, the more it tickles her pride. Pride is vic-tuals and drink to her. I ought to know her after ten years of it—I was a girl when I came to her."

"Girls," remarked the valet pithily, "are of many ages."

"Mr. Tighe!"

"Some," Tighe continued urbanely, "twenty or so, like you, Miss Morley, when you came here. Some forty or so, like me."

Unfortunately, he caught the butler's eye, and Morley caught its message.

"I didn't know," she observed cuttingly, "you were a girl; I thought you were just an old woman."

The sharpness of this retort quite smoothed the temper of its witty author. Finally ignoring the two gentlemen, she turned to Primmer.

"Her ladyship doesn't speak to me, nor yet treat me, like she treats the Countess. She's too sharp for that. She knows better than browbeat those who could up and off, and would too, salary or no salary."

"That's her meanness," Primmer agreed. "You speak truth, Miss Morley. She must *know* that the Countess is a lady——"

"But doesn't she know the Countess is her own daughter?" asked Mr. Tighe inquisitively.

"No more," Miss Morley put in sharply, "than she knows your master is her husband. And she thinks *him* quite common: a hanger-on, like."

Sir Jeremy's valet pulled his collar up, and reddened.

"But," continued Miss Morley, "that's your master's concern. It don't bother *me*. But it's frightful to see how she puts on the Countess, and insults her. I must say I never thought of Miss Jacqueline turning out a saint, but she *is* one, and that's flat."

Primmer was instantly won over by this tribute.

"A truer word," she said, "you never spoke. And there's few could have better opportunities than you of judging."

"There's none. The things I've had to see! The Countess is more wonderful, far, than Lady Berengaria was; for she got unlimited love and gratitude for what *she* did, and the Countess gets

nought but dislike and ingratitude. Besides, Lady Berengaria was treated as a sister and a lady, and never had menial things to do. Her job was hard enough and sad enough, but it was not sickening, and she was paid with daily thanks and praise. The Countess is paid with blame, and snubs, and insults. And Lady Berengaria was an oldish woman, and *liked* to live shut up and quiet. The life wasn't a prison to her. It's prison and hard labour to the Countess."

"At her age," remarked the butler, who had a girl of his own of much the same age, "it would be natural for her to think of a bit of life and pleasure. That's true enough."

"But," suggested Mr. Tighe, again inquisitively, "the Countess is a widow. It'd be a bit soon for life and pleasure and that—the Count not dead much above a year."

"Nineteen months," Primmer corrected.

"Ah! That's pretty definite. I never knew the date precisely."

"Well, you know now. It was just nineteen months ago that the ship he was crossing in was blown up by a German mine."

"And the remains identified?" suggested the valet.

Primmer, exasperated, remarked trenchantly:

"Mr. Tighe, if you were blown up in the air in about nine hundred pieces, in the middle of the

'Straits of Dover, I dare say Mrs. Tighe *would* put off in a boat and piece them together and identify them. It would be a melancholy pleasure; she'd naturally like to make sure."

Morley led the laugh, and Tighe succumbed.

"All the same," he observed darkly to the butler as they walked down the avenue together, each to the Doric temple that was his home, on either side of the wide entrance-gates—"all the same, mark my words else, there's a Miss Terry. Why should old Primmer be so hot else? Venomous, she was. Prob'ly the Count's remains never *were* to hand: and he may be alive and well on a desert island. And a rum go we'd have of it if he turned up after Miss Jacqueline had married again!"

"In the Channel," said the butler, who liked safe statements, "there aren't any desert islands that I've ever heard tell of."

"Ay, but folks drift, and get picked up by sailing craft and that, and carried far enough, and macarooned, as they call it, on islands when mutinies take place. I've read a bit in my time, Binns. It'd be bigamy, you know, Countess or no Countess. P'r'aps Lady Adelgitha knows more than we think for, and that's what made her speak so fierce about 'followers.' There's more gumption in those crazy ones than folks that haven't read a lot would guess at."

And the literary valet turned to the left with a

pretty complacent 'Good-night.' He was quite in love with his own theory.

"Depend upon it," he thought, "Lady Adelgitha has a *hold* upon the Countess: and p'r'aps the Countess don't exactly know what it is, but can only guess and guess: and that's what keeps her under. It wouldn't be natural, else, her letting of herself be trampled on in the dirt like that, nor yet like what she used to be. Countesses don't act unpaid insanity-attendants for nothing. Countesses don't. P'r'aps her ladyship knows she *isn't* a Countess: the Count may have had a wife or so in Italy, and it was found out when they went there. Those foreigners aren't domestic—far from domestic, mostly. Then, when he was blown on—the real Countess turning up, maybe, with a twin on each arm, and a strawberry-mark on each of their little shoulder-blades (same as their pa may have had, for what we know) to identify 'em. Why, there'd be a fine how-de-do! The Count scooting, and Miss Jacqueline taking to her bed, and Sir Jeremy telegraphed for. Why, it's all a deal plainer to understand than what they let on to *us*. It would be just the thing to kill pore Lady Berengaria; and I saw her buried myself, and so did nigh a hundred folks. Miss Jacqueline may have turned into a saint, but don't tell *me* she'd let herself be insulted and that unless her ma had a secret hold on her."

CHAPTER LI

LORD HELMSTONE had been in France many months before he got any leave, and when it came it was short enough. He was at first on the staff of a divisional General; but when his chief was promoted to the command of an Army Corps he went back to his regiment, and he found the regimental work in some ways more interesting. Twice he had been mentioned in despatches, and he had received the Military Cross and the D.S.O.

Jacqueline read of these things, and told herself that now, at any rate, he had a purpose in life, and was not idle. But she didn't speak of him to anyone, any more than she spoke to anyone of her own purpose in life—to serve, for no wage of love, where duty called, and where her service was needed. She had no unconfessed illusions, and knew well that her mother would never like her; but she knew also that she was useful, indispensable—and without her there would be no one. What she did not know was that her earliest critic was turned into a most respectful admirer.

Frederick was also an officer now; and, until he went to France, was in London with his regiment at Wellington Barracks. But he was able very often to come down to Boon Court from Saturday afternoon to Sunday night, and each of these visits increased his rather awed respect for his sister.

Her life seemed to him inhuman, and she bore it as if there were nothing to bear. He had never liked his stepmother, who had never concealed her supercilious disregard of him: and it hardly surprised him to see her tyranny develop now that the restraint of Berengaria's presence was removed; but it did surprise him to see Jacqueline's patience under it, that best patience which does not proclaim itself. To himself personally Adelgitha was more civil now than she used to be. She liked Guardsmen, and she began to perceive that the young officer was good-looking and had a fine figure. To do him justice, he did no more than accept these improved relations with a cool politeness; he was too angry with her for her treatment of his sister to be willing to grow into any cordiality.

He saw also that to his father Lady Adelgitha was usually more pleasant than had been her wont: still very distant and on her guard, but seldom now rude. She kept all her tyranny and rudeness for Jacqueline.

"I had no idea," he said to himself, "that a woman could be so brutal."

In former days he had had a sort of almost angry annoyance with Jacqueline for seeming to care more for the mother who was indifferent to her than for the aunt who gave her a real mother's love.

"Can't she see," he used to think, "that her mother never *will* care for her?"

He knew now that Jacqueline saw quite clearly that her mother hated her: that it was in no forlorn hope of winning her mother's love that the poor girl accepted her intolerable position. It must be for duty that she served: and Frederick thought duty should be the great watchword of life. It almost disconcerted him to find in his sister the quality he most admired exemplified so heroically.

"At first," he admitted to his father, "I thought it might be one of her caprices. She never knew how to count the cost of anything. But she shows no sign of faltering, she is steady in her resolve, and nothing she has to undergo makes her flinch."

"No. She never flinches. And you hardly know what she *has* to bear: I would sooner see her struck than have to see the things she has to bear. She grows more steady in bearing every day. Sometimes I ask myself if I have the right to let it go on."

"How could you stop it?"

"That is it. I do not see any way. It was the whole aim of Berengaria's life to keep her sister here, and let her be at home instead of—among strangers. She was not the woman to ask any promise on her death-bed, but that would have been the promise she would have asked—if she *had* been of that sort: that no change might be made. Jac-

queline is keeping the promise that was never asked."

"But——"

Frederick paused awkwardly, and then went on:

"But could she not remain here with—with such attendance as she would have elsewhere? Must it all fall on Jacqueline?"

"Jacqueline would never consent, any more than Berengaria would."

Father and son both understood this: that Jacqueline would never let unrequited and unpaid love and devotion be exchanged for mere hired competence.

"I can see no end to it," said Frederick.

"Nor I."

They both knew that to all intents and purposes Lady Adelgitha was a young woman, healthy and very strong: forty years hence she might well be alive, and what would those forty years be for Jacqueline?

"Father," said Frederick, walking impatiently to and fro, "it *can't* be right to let Jacqueline's life be so horribly sacrificed. It is noble of her to be willing; but . . . is she *never* to have any happiness?"

"My boy, happiness is not for everyone."

Frederick thought of his father's life during all the years since Jacqueline's birth. Nevertheless, he felt that his father had not been simply unhappy: he had liked it on the whole. He knew (he had

always known, and had been used to resent) that Jacqueline's nature was unlike his own or their father's.

That night before she left the saloon Adelgitha indulged herself in a gust of insolence and insult to Jacqueline, as though to compensate herself for an evening of urbanities and civilities to Frederick and his father. She had just risen as though to retire, and Frederick went across hastily to the door as though unable to stay in the room. But he only opened the door, and held it open as if waiting for his stepmother to pass out.

"Oh," Adelgitha called out, breaking off abruptly in a sentence of scolding rudeness to Jacqueline, "you must not stand there waiting for me. I have some fault to find with this young person, and I prefer not to sleep on it."

Frederick closed the door again, and came forward.

"The young person," he said, with a very red face, "is my sister."

"Then you had better improve your sister's manners. I have great reason to object to them."

"The shoe, I think, is on the other foot!" the young man exclaimed angrily.

Lady Adelgitha raised her pretty eyebrows and then smiled: if she had shrugged her shoulders it could not have been more expressive, or more impertinent.

"Ah!" she said, without opening her lips, "your sister will never learn manners from *you!*"

Aloud she only remarked:

"Perhaps, Sir Jeremy, *you* will now open the door for me."

And she bowed very finely to him as she passed out. Her speech to her daughter could be that of an ill-bred virago, but she carried herself nobly, like a great lady; and how pretty she looked, and how young!

It was that youthfulness of appearance that filled Frederick with dismay.

"She will live," he said to himself, "for forty years!"

And how about Jacqueline?

CHAPTER LII

It was on the following day that Frederick met Lord Helmstone in St. James's Park. Helmstone was again at home on leave.

"My aunt is up here," he said, "and we are going down to Wildspur together this afternoon."

"Shall you go over to Boon Court?"

"Do you think I may? Would your sister see me?"

"Yes; I am sure she would."

"Then I will go. My aunt—*our* aunt—meant, to ask her to come over to luncheon."

"I don't think she could do that."

Then Frederick told Helmstone all about it. He was full of the subject, and spoke with hurried energy. It was easy to see that he was much moved, and that he was angry—but not, as he used to be, with his sister. Helmstone marked the change.

"It seems terrible," he said.

"It is terrible. Her mother is brutal—absolutely brutal—to her. And I can see no end to it—nor can my father. The woman's physical health is perfect, and Jacqueline, we may be sure, has devoted herself to this hideous service for life—for her mother's life. It seems hopeless. Mind you, Helmstone, this is no fad of my sister's. She had plenty of fads. But this is simply the acceptance of a dreadful duty, and she will not waver—my father says so too. I cannot tell you how I respect and admire her; but the more I respect her, the more I grow desperate thinking of what a price she will have to pay—simply her life. You will find her changed."

"You mean altered in appearance?"

"I did not mean altered for the worse. She was pretty——"

"Pretty!"

"Didn't you think so?"

"Your sister was much more than pretty. She was always the loveliest girl I knew."

"Ah! Well, she has grown beautiful. And she is *finer* than she was."

Helmstone, when he saw Jacqueline, fully agreed to this. Very young she still looked, but her youth had added to itself something finer than mere womanhood. In laying herself aside, she had received from God something greater than herself. What He asks is our all, and then He gives His all. No one has ever outdone Him in giving.

Helmstone had dreaded to find her miserable, a victim. With finer intuition than her brother's, he saw at once that she was no victim, nor miserable. She had ceased to seek herself, and had found something better. Our worst pains come from this troubled seeking of ourselves, and those pains vexed her no more. He found her more serene than when he had known her before, and more gentle: never rough-tongued, she had been critical by habit, and yet unobservant. She now looked out beyond herself with a kindlier interest, observed more, and with readier sympathy. He had thought of her formerly that she must be disappointed because she asked too much of life, and seemed to expect to get it all at once—in one day, in one gift. Now she seemed to ask nothing, but in giving to get all she wanted.

Before he left her, and he did not stay long, he knew that somehow his own love for her had grown more correspondent to what was new in her. She

herself had lifted it. It had always been unselfish, but it had grown chiefly out of admiration for her beauty: her beauty was higher now, and his admiration was higher also; but it was no longer admiration of her strange loveliness, pure and almost childlike as it was, in spite of its fuller flower, that lay now at the bottom of his love for her. He could feel how slight a thing her beauty was in reference to herself, a mere item; not trivial, for no part of a noble whole is trivial, but so entirely a subordinate part that he could not think of it except as inseparable from herself.

His love for her had always been humble—too humble, others had thought: his aunt, for instance, and perhaps Miss Graystock and Frederick. Now it was more reverential, more like a worship: for it concerned herself rather than mere accidents. He had thought himself not clever enough for her, ungifted with the tastes she would demand; her greater simplicity—and she had always been simple—made him more simply conscious of her elevation above himself. Nevertheless, he felt himself less aloof. Her greater elevation was less forbidding than her old half-scornful tolerance of a young man, harmless, but of no consequence.

"I used," she said, smiling, "to hector you for doing nothing. I couldn't scold you now, if I wanted to."

"I cannot imagine you scolding," he answered.

"What you call hectoring was a sign of interest no one else had ever troubled to show in me."

"Ah! I expected everyone to do so much and be so much. Well, you have done plenty since those days, and I have read of it, and thought of it, and been glad."

"Of you I have thought always."

"I am glad," she said, her clear eyes meeting his. "I have never had many friends, and can make no new ones: I am grateful to be remembered."

"I am much more than grateful to hear you call me your friend."

"Ah! I always knew you were a friend. I was too full of fancies to be grateful then: but I am now. It seems so odd to think of those days—when I went to parties, and danced, and heard operas. I liked it—pretty well. But I don't believe I was thinking much about it."

He thought he knew what she was thinking about in those days. The one interest, as he imagined, had been the idea of meeting the man she married. He had supposed it to be so at the time, but he had only been half right; for he had never guessed how oddly impersonal her interest in Selvaggio had been. It was true she had desired to meet him, but to learn some new thing from him, to be taught something additional, to catch from him some hint as to a fresh aspect of life, an undiscovered phase

of life—an emotion, for life was to her then a stage for the appearance and action of emotions.

"You never seemed to me quite happy," said Helmstone. "Is it impertinent to say that?"

"No. It is true. How can it be impertinent?"

Helmstone laughed gently, and said:

"True impertinence is the worst of all—most people would think."

"Would they? I can't see that. I wasn't happy; I was trying to be. It doesn't come that way. I am happier now."

"Yes. I can see that."

"Can you? I am glad—grateful, even. It troubles me to know that my brother cannot see it. He is very sympathetic. He thinks much of me, and I can see that he chafes against things that are inevitable, for my sake. I wonder if you would tell him what you have told me—that you see I am happier than I used to be? We are shy together. I should like you to tell him."

"I will do so; I would do anything you asked me. But—may I tell you what he feels?"

"Yes."

"He thinks you are being sacrificed. And, I think, he is a man who has an abhorrence of injustice."

"Yes; he is a man now. You are right."

She paused, and Helmstone thought she meant to say no more, but she added almost at once:

"There is no injustice here, however, for him to abhor. I can see that he has told you of my life here. He only sees the surface of it, and so it tries him. I am not sacrificed—I am . . ."

"What?"

"Called. It sounds so dreadful to speak of oneself that way. But I want you to understand and to make Freddy understand. Can you not understand being called along a road that has rough places—and yet to follow any other road would be impossible?"

"Yes, I can understand that."

She said no more for a moment, then added this: "And this, also, you can understand—to serve, where one loves, without reward."

"That I will learn to understand—if I do not yet."

Alas! *how* could he serve? She had a thing to *do*. What was there he could do? She gave him his answer, by being what he saw her—he could love, and worship. God Himself takes that from most of us, who have nothing else to give Him.

So Helmstone went his way, almost happy: taught already by her, though he could do nothing for her. The reward she herself gave him he could not know was his.

"He is noble," she said to herself, as she went upstairs to her mother's room. "Was he always? Was I blind, or has it grown to him?"

Then she entered her mother's presence, and Lady Adelgitha rated her for having followers. The road along which she was called was rough there.

CHAPTER LIII

"So you saw her?" said Lady Louisa, eagerly curious.

"Yes. I saw her for more than half an hour."

"And she can't come here to luncheon?"

"No. She is never out for more than an hour. She rides sometimes; but she could not ride here and stay to luncheon."

"Why shouldn't I meet her and ride with her? I could call for her."

"Yes, I should think so."

"So could you, for that matter."

Helmstone shook his head.

"That would be different."

"Certainly. And far more to the point."

Helmstone took no notice of this remark. He was grave and thoughtful.

"How did you find her?" his aunt demanded.

"Well; she looked perfectly well; she looked taller, I think."

"No doubt she is thinner. I don't believe in her being so well as you say. They will kill her between them. They're all mad together, it seems to me. Was she gracious?"

"'Gracious'?"

"You know what I mean."

"She was perfect."

"Dear me!"

For a while neither of them said any more. His aunt was watching him, while he looked down into the pulsing heart of the fire. He irritated her by his present silence, and also by what seemed to her his backwardness.

"Helmstone," she said at last, quite abruptly, "I know you want to marry her."

But, in truth, he was not thinking of marrying and giving in marriage. He had come too recently from Jacqueline herself.

"Loody," he answered quietly, "I don't think you understand. You would if you had just seen her, as I have."

"You care for her. You never did care for any girl before—or play at caring."

"I'm glad of that—anyway."

"I know she used not to care for you. Do you mean she never will?"

"She will, I believe, always think of me as a friend—a friend apart."

"And that satisfies you!"

He did not answer at all. But there was no resentment in his silence—only gravity. Lady Louisa saw this and was emboldened—she had feared a snub.

"Helmstone," she persisted, "I should not have thought you likely to be contented with—friendship."

Then he spoke.

"It is more than I ever hoped for."

"Then you should be encouraged to hope for more still. You have always been too diffident."

"Loody, you were always wrong. Till she married that man she thought only of him. Now she is not thinking of such things—marriage, and all that."

"It is not her business to. But it is yours to make her think of it."

"No. She has a thing to do, and no one can interfere. Her way is not the common way. If . . ."

"If what?"

"I was going to say that if I could, by a word, make her take a lower way—and no word from anyone could do that—I should not dare to say that word: there are things too high for the interference of such men as I am."

He meant more than this: he knew that he would not wish, even to gain her, that she should leave her higher way, and be anything less than what he saw her to be. He could not lose anything of the worship he had for her—even to hear her say she would be his wife.

"So it is to go on—for ever!"

"God knows that."

"So you shuffle off your responsibility on God! And the sacrifice of her life is to be laid by all of you on God's shoulders! It makes me sick."

"You haven't seen her," Helmstone answered gently; "you would think as I do if you had."

"Should I? No; I haven't seen her since this horrible *auto-da-fé* began. But I know all about it. Her father has told me. The whole thing is inhuman. Flesh and blood can't stand what she has to."

"No. It isn't flesh and blood. It's something greater—that we never think of."

"What a pity," cried his aunt savagely, "that that mad termagant of a mother of hers has not jumped out of her window. It would be the only decent thing she ever did. I'll tell you what: the girl is as mad as her mother."

"Please," said Helmstone, looking up and meeting his aunt's eyes with his own, "do not ever say that again."

Of one thing, at all events, Lady Louisa was sure—that he was more in love with Jacqueline than ever.

On the following morning she went over to Boon Court alone and saw Jacqueline for quarter of an hour.

"Helmstone tells me," she said, "that you could not come over to luncheon."

"No. I am always with my mother at meal-

times. I go out every day for an hour or so—sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon: just as it fits in. I could hardly let you know beforehand.”

“But if I rode over on chance and you were free, couldn’t we ride together?”

“I will see—when Lord Helmstone has gone away again.”

“Why not till then?”

“He told me he was here only for a few days, and of course you and he should ride together.”

“Yes; but why not you with us?”

“I don’t think I can tell you. My mother has an invalid’s fancies, and I know she would not like me to go out riding just now with you: to-day she is less well. Perhaps in a week or so she may be well again.”

Later on Jacqueline did now and then ride with Lady Louisa; and she seemed always ready and willing to hear any news of Lord Helmstone, but too simply and frankly so to satisfy his aunt.

Once Lady Louisa manœuvred the talk into the subject of self-sacrifice. She had spoken of a young man of very high position, wealthy, and with all that this world can give at his feet, who had just been killed.

“It is splendid,” said Lady Louisa, “but, perhaps, too splendid for me.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

"Well, his heroism meant breaking the hearts of his father and mother. They have no one else."

"They have him still—so it seems to me. I do not know them, but even when this has happened they must, I should think, wish him to have done his duty. He didn't get killed on purpose."

"What he did meant almost certain death."

"I suppose it had to be done."

"Self-sacrifice," said Lady Louisa, after a moment's pause, "is often very selfish, I think. The self-sacrificing person doesn't stop to consider that another life is involved, and that he or she is deliberately spoiling that other life as well as his—or her—own."

"One can only do one thing at a time. God doesn't expect us to do everything at once. When one duty is plain and present it has to be done first. I don't believe that doing it can ever really harm the other duty. It's God's business to see to that."

"You are all of you very fond of arranging what God has to do," said Lady Louisa sharply, "and it seems to me you leave Him all the dirty work—all the toughest jobs."

Then her heart smote her, for she had a heart, though a queer one. Certainly the girl at her side had chosen dirty work enough for her own share. Only that morning Sir Jeremy had been over at Wildspur and had been telling its mistress of fresh instances of what Jacqueline had to endure.

Her heart smote her, and she did not do what she had intended—bring Jacqueline to book for sacrificing Helmstone while indulging her own morbid sacrifice of herself.

CHAPTER LIV

HALF a year later Helmstone was in England on leave again; and again he was at Wildspur, for his aunt took care to be there and not in London.

Frederick was now in France, and the two young men had met there. Before leaving England on the former occasion Helmstone had gone to see Frederick in London, and had told him that he had seen his sister and had found her—happy! He had told the brother also how conscious of his sympathy Jacqueline was.

"It is more than sympathy—I am angry for her."

"Yes. I dare say I should be. But, Joscelyn, she doesn't want that. The sense of your brotherly affection helps her—ever so much. I could see that. But it doesn't help her your being angry."

"You would be angry if you had seen her with her mother."

"Yes—but it wouldn't cheer or help her."

"What can? How can anybody help her?"

"I don't see how. Perhaps she doesn't need help—not ours."

"I used to think she had hardly any religion: only waves of fancy. She was insubordinate and irregular. She was not steady—like other Catholics."

"I suppose religion means going God's way, and I'm sure *she* is."

"So am I—now. It is beyond me."

Helmstone thought she might always have been 'beyond' him. But he did not say so; he was content that her brother should do her justice now.

"Look here," he said as he rose to go, "you know pretty well how it is. I always wished to marry her, only there was no chance."

"And what chance is there now?"

"None. None now. It would be profane to ask her—even if I could dare to."

"And this may last her life!"

"If it lasts her life I shall never marry. That is all I know."

What more could anyone know?

After half a year Helmstone was again in England, and again at Wildspur. He barely caught the train at Victoria, and while hurrying to do so he nearly ran into two nuns who were being somewhat jostled in the crowd; they evidently could not find any porter to carry their modest baggage, nor even find anyone to tell them which was their train or which their platform.

In haste as he was, he stopped, saluted, and said:

"Let me help you. It is impossible to get hold of porters, and it is all confusion."

"Thank you, indeed. How kind you are!" said a very gentle and sweet voice. "We want the train for Crossway Junction."

"It is just going, and I am going by it—let me take those things."

And he caught up their luggage, which was not much, and piloted the two bewildered ladies through the crowd.

When they reached the train it was actually moving, and Helmstone opened the door of the nearest carriage and made the Sisters get in, jumping in after them only just in time.

"We never travel first-class!" declared the nun who had spoken before, a little out of breath, but smiling quite cheerfully.

The other nun shook her head.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Helmstone, laughing, "and you will get over it."

He was quite sure that in pre-nun days this little lady had been well inured to first-class travelling.

"We must try," she agreed. "Eh, Sister Barbara?"

Sister Barbara almost sighed. She evidently thought some effort would be necessary. She also had been a first-class passenger till five years before, but had never thought of herself as likely to relapse.

The two nuns settled down, each in her corner, and seemed disposed to keep silence. But Helmstone wanted to talk. He was sure the elder of the two could talk if she chose.

"Are you going beyond Crossways?" he asked.

"Yes. To a station called Coldbatch."

"Why, that's where I get out. I will look after you all the way."

"At Crossways we must get into a third-class carriage."

"Of course," said Sister Barbara, almost impatiently. She clearly had no notion of giving up the world and travelling in luxury.

"If they're not all full," observed the other nun demurely. And Helmstone felt more than ever resolved to make her talk.

"I expect they *will* all be full," he declared.

Sister Barbara shook her head again, and looked out of the window. There were rows of dingy houses outside, turning their squalid backs on the train; she immediately fell to silent praying for the people who lived in them, and then for all the people in the train itself. "Bring them all home," she prayed, "safe to the end of their journey, and safe to the end of the other."

Helmstone could see her face, though it was turned half aside, and he knew well that she was praying.

In the carriage there was no one out themselves: he and the two Sisters.

"You do not travel much?" he said in a lower voice, and speaking more exclusively to the elder nun.

"Never. Never, I mean, normally. But I am going to visit another convent of our Order, lately established near Coldbatch, at a village called Bohun Marshal—Boon Marshal, they pronounce it."

"I know it quite well. It is a mile from Boon Court. I have friends there."

The little nun gave a sort of bow, but made no comment. He saw threatening symptoms of a relapse into silence.

"They are all Catholics at Boon Court," he went on promptly. "I wonder if you know them?"

"I know one of them very well."

"Would you mind telling me which one?"

"Countess Selvaggio."

"I know her best of them all. She is my—greatest friend."

The little nun bowed again, and again showed signs of that tendency to relapse into silence. Helmstone felt a little aggrieved.

"I wonder if you have seen her lately?" he asked.

"No, not for several years—before her marriage."

"Look here," said Helmstone, taking the bull by the horns, "I know she once tried to be a nun—was it then?"

"Yes. It was in our convent—far away in the Midlands. But she was not for us. God has called her by a more wonderful way."

"Yes. It is wonderful. I know it all. I am not a Catholic——"

"Why not?" And it was a thing the nun had never asked anybody in her life before, and a thing she never knew how she came to ask then.

"I don't know why: except that I was not born one. But every Catholic interests me because of her. You would understand if you knew her now."

"I know of her life; for her father (I think he likes writing letters) writes to me sometimes, and he has told me—some of it. The rest I guessed."

"Forgive me, no one could guess it. Could you guess that she is happy?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if you know *what* her life is. It would be a sheer horror to most people."

He was almost angry with the little elderly Sister for taking it, as he thought, so coolly—as a matter of course.

Then the Mother Prioress turned to him, and said in her gentle, unruffled voice (perceiving well how she had irritated him):

"Long ago a quiet monk wrote in his wonderful

book, 'If thou seekest thyself, thou shalt find great trouble.' That is no longer what Jacqueline seeks, and she has found great peace. That is all my guessing comes to."

"Yes, I see—you do understand," the young soldier answered her.

"I always knew," the Prioress added, "that she was rare: and I did not think she was for us or our way—which isn't rare in that fashion, only a little less than common. There was sure to be some singular and especial way for her, and the gate of it was to open out of her own home."

After that she would not talk much more. At Crossways Helmstone took charge of them, and put them and their luggage into a third-class carriage of the waiting local train. But at Coldbatch there was no fly, and he insisted on their using his aunt's motor-car.

"It is four miles, and you *cannot* walk it," he declared. "You and Sister Barbara must get in here. I will go outside with the driver."

And he had his own way: Sister Barbara could only protest by sitting very upright and entirely refusing the comfort of the well-padded, softly cushioned motor.

CHAPTER LV

ON the following day Helmstone rode over to Boon Court, but was told that Countess Selvaggio had just ridden out.

"She was going, I think, my lord, to Coldbatch," said the servant. "She went towards the west lodge."

Helmstone did not ask if Sir Jeremy was at home, and immediately made up his mind that he would follow Jacqueline.

In ten minutes he overtook her.

"Are you surprised to see me?" he asked.

"Yes. For I didn't know you were in England; but it is a very nice surprise."

"I called at the house, and they told me you had gone this way, so I followed. I hope you don't mind?"

"Mind! I'm delighted. But I can't offer to turn back: I must go to Coldbatch; but perhaps you will come with me."

"Of course I will if you'll let me. Are you going to welcome the new nuns?"

"What do you know about the new nuns?"

"I know *them*. But I don't know the name of the one I like best—I like them both. But Sister Barbara won't talk to me."

Jacqueline laughed at the idea of Sister Barbara

being called upon to talk to a young officer, and then Helmstone told her how he had scraped acquaintance with the two nuns, and Jacqueline told him that the elder sister was the Prioress. So talking, he and she found themselves on very friendly and unconstrained terms—much more so than if they had had at once to talk about themselves.

Presently, however, she said:

"Now I must congratulate you."

Six weeks earlier Helmstone had been promoted; a couple of months before that he had been awarded the Victoria Cross.

"Ah! but you wrote your congratulations. I never expected it, and it was all the more prized."

He did not tell her that her letter was in his pocket at that moment.

"You are well?" he asked. "You really look well."

"Oh yes. I am always well. Even Freddy had to confess I looked well when he came home on leave. It is funny to think how he and I used to skirmish; we are as benign to each other now as a couple of old ladies."

"I used to think he was rather an old lady; but I can't imagine you becoming one."

"Becoming! No. I've got over it early, and favourably, like measles. But Freddy isn't at all an old lady."

"Not a bit. Being a soldier suits him, though he never would have chosen to be one."

Their talk, it will be seen, was very ordinary talk, yet the occasion did not seem ordinary to Helmstone. He had never ridden with her before, and had seldom spoken to her except in a drawing-room. And then, somehow, he had gathered the impression that not only was she glad to see him, but that he had, as she had told him it would be, been often in her thoughts during his six months' absence. That she had been ever in his he made her see as plainly as if he had declared it in many words.

"I am," he said, "kept constantly posted by my aunt in any news there is about you. She has something to tell in every letter."

"She must be very clever: for nothing ever happens to me. Perhaps she enlarges."

"She is quite capable of it." And he laughed a little.

"She also tells me all about you—only there's so much more to tell."

"No doubt she does enlarge."

"I have sometimes guessed as much."

That evening Helmstone turned sharply on his aunt and demanded:

"What have you been telling Jacqueline about me?"

"I told her you had been promoted to Major, and that you had gained the V.C."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. That your portrait was in the newspapers, and that it looked like Mr. Asquith."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing of any consequence."

"*What* else?"

"I told her that you wanted to marry her."

"Why did you tell her so?"

"Because I thought you did. If you have changed your mind I must explain to her that there has been a little mistake. Oh, and I also told her that she wanted to marry you. You and she had got so up on the high ropes that I thought it was as well she should know the facts. She would never have known them if I hadn't stepped in. Where angels fear to tread it is generally good going for reasonable people. Now you can be as savage as you like."

Was he savage?

A young man usually likes to propose for himself, and rarely commissions his aunt to do it for him. Lady Louisa had no business to interfere—but, then, tact was a thing she had never laid claim to.

"I warned her," that lady went on rather hurriedly, "that there were others in the field."

"Others in the field! What——"

"Yes. I thought it right to mention that Lady Millicent Grace also wanted to be Lady Helmstone—and she said——"

"What did she say?"

"That Lady Millicent squints."

"I'm sure she didn't say any such thing. And I begin to believe you've invented the whole story. You do tell them, you know. She says herself you enlarge."

"Ah! that shows I did tell her. Shall I explain that I was wrong, and that you *don't* want to marry her? I can't also say, 'And I'm sure you don't want to marry him.'"

CHAPTER LVI

BEFORE they parted Jacqueline had said to Helmstone:

"Cousin Amelia Graystock is coming down to stay with us to-night. Will you and Lady Louisa come to luncheon to-morrow?"

Miss Graystock had not been many hours at Boon Court before she was aware of something that had not been perceived either by Sir Jeremy or his daughter. Frederick, when he came home on leave, had thought he noticed it, but had not felt so sure as did this old lady: and to neither his father nor his sister could he speak of it.

As Miss Graystock bade Lady Adelgitha good-night, she said to herself:

"She is much more mad. And she knows it. And she knows that I see it."

Then, up in her own room, Amelia, thinking it all over, was sure she was right.

"She is more mad. And she has degenerated. I suppose Berengaria used to keep up all that was best in her, and keep down all that was worst. It isn't only her vulgar brutality to Jacqueline—that's a symptom, only one of many. She eats with gross self-indulgence now (she was always greedy), and she drinks too much. I wonder if she drinks in secret too? Her eyes are the eyes of a woman who drinks."

While she was thus thinking there came a tap at her door, and Miss Graystock at first thought it was her maid, who had come back to ask some question. But it was her cousin Adelgitha.

"I wanted to see you," she said, coming in and closing the door. "I hope you don't mind?"

Amelia did mind. She did not relish the idea of a *tête-à-tête* at that lonely hour, but she said:

"Oh no. Only I was just going to bed."

"I won't keep you long. But I'm worried."

"How are you worried, Addy?"

"Berengaria bothers me. So unlike her! She never did bother me or anyone. But now she does. She comes."

"Comes!"

"Yes. Often. And she won't talk—but she shakes her head, and frowns, and hints things."

"Hints things!"

"Yes. You know she always took that girl's part. She ruined her."

"What girl?"

Amelia knew very well that Jacqueline was the girl. But she said "What girl?" very austerely.

"The girl I have about me. Berengaria's pick-up—whom she adopted."

"You mean—my cousin Jacqueline."

"Oh! Your cousin! A nasty girl—with followers. Soldiers come after her. But I won't have it. And Berengaria hints about her—shakes her head, and scowls, and points towards where the girl sleeps in the little room by mine. Berengaria scolds me about her—without talking. If she would talk I could explain."

"It isn't Berengaria: it's your own conscience," said Amelia coolly and boldly. And it was bold of her, for she did not like being alone with a mad woman at that late and lonely hour.

"My——?"

"Your conscience. Adelgitha, take my word for it, if you treat Jacqueline well you will not be worried by—Berengaria."

"Ah, but I *can't* treat her well, as you call it. (You mean spoil her, as Berengaria used to do.)"

"Why can't you?"

"Because I can't. Everything in me tells me to keep her under. My nature is up in arms against upstarts. And I hate beauties! Of course *you* couldn't admire her."

"Yes, I do. She is a lovely girl—more than lovely: quite beautiful."

"Ah! *You* are bewitched too! That shows, I can see, that she bewitches people—and I never could abide girls who were by way of beauties. *I'm* not going to be bewitched. I keep her under. It's very unfair of Berengaria to change so—you'd think she'd have improved. She comes and bothers me. And I wish I could get away, somewhere where she didn't know I was. You couldn't take me to London? Berengaria would never follow me there. She dislikes London so, and thinks it disagrees with her."

"Addy, I'm not living in London at present. I'm staying about, and shan't go back there till February."

"Well, if Berengaria comes to you too, tell her I am right about that girl, and beg her to leave me alone."

Amelia did not enjoy this at all. She had loved and respected Berengaria, and was sure she was in a happy place, and knew very well that Adelgitha was mad; but it made her uncomfortable to hear

the suggestion that perhaps Berengaria might come to her that night.

"Addy," she said gently, "let me go to bed. I'm tired; a journey by train tires me more than it used. As for dear Berengaria, she would never come to you except in love——"

"Ah! it isn't in love. She looks angry. She comes to find fault——"

"Then, do you amend the fault. She always loved you more than anything on earth, and if she could be grieved where she is, it might be to know that you were stubborn in some fault."

"Ah! I see you are bewitched by that girl and her would-be pretty face. I waste words on you. . . ."

And with a petulant gesture Adelgitha turned to the door and went out.

Next day, after breakfast, Amelia came to Sir Jeremy in his study and said:

"Excuse me for what I am doing, but it is on my conscience. What I have to say is difficult, but I am sure I ought to say it."

Then she sat down and told him plainly, though in as tactful words as she could find, that his wife was more insane than had been the case in Berengaria's lifetime, and that it was undeniable that she hated Jacqueline and had a grudge against her.

"What grudge can she have? Jacqueline is her slave—simply her slave."

"Yes. And is it right that she should be so? But slave-masters have hated devoted slaves before now. The grudge I take to be this—she is fiercely jealous of Jacqueline's beauty. She hates her, and it is not right—it is not safe—to allow Jacqueline to sleep in that little room opening from hers."

"Adelgitha's maid sleeps in the outer room, also opening from hers."

"Yes. But her maid is a puny creature. She could do nothing."

"Do nothing!"

"Sir Jeremy, I am taking a great licence, but you must forgive me. Addy is less accountable than ever, and her alienation is plainly growing, and her hatred of dear Jacqueline is becoming an obsession. If there were any accident I should never forgive myself for not having warned you. Nor would you forgive yourself if you had disregarded my warning."

It was quite true that Sir Jeremy, much as he had really suffered from his wife's persecution of their daughter, had not realized that it was an evidence of stronger and more active mania. This failure to realize the truth was in part due to the simple fact that he was by nature slow of observation, and partly due to what was best in the man and what was less good: almost to blind himself to his wife's insanity was a sort of habit of loyalty he had

learned from Berengaria; and then he was indolent, ever willing to ignore anything unwelcome and unpleasant.

He was, even now, only half willing to be convinced.

"Dear Berengaria!" he said. "I feel sure that Jacqueline, like myself, accepted it as a sort of tacit bequest of Berengaria's that her death should—should make no change. You know it was the effort of her life to keep Adelgitha here—in her place as a member of the family."

"Yes, Sir Jeremy. It was, I know. But her death *has* made a change: the change I am venturing to bring to your notice. Addy herself has changed: she is not in the state in which Berengaria knew her. You, living always with her, could not, I dare say, note such a change, not sudden, but growing from day to day. I cannot help noticing it: and the growth has been great and rapid. Whether Berengaria was at all wrong originally, I can't say: I know the noble devotion of her heart; and, remember, when she began her self-imposed task the children were babies—perhaps she could not be expected to realize how Jacqueline's life would be affected. Sir Jeremy, has Jacqueline been fairly dealt with? Think how she has grown up: what sort of a home this has been for her. Think of the morbid conditions of her life, of its isolation. If she made a disastrous marriage, was it

strange? Was it all her fault? To marry is the ordinary lot of girls: how could a normal, becoming marriage be expected for her? Whom did she ever meet? In plain English, was not she sacrificed to her mother—the mother who never liked her? Is she not sacrificed to her mother now? the mother who bitterly hates her? It was terribly difficult for me to bring myself to speak of this to you: but now I must say it all out. All along Jacqueline's life has been sacrificed to her mother. How would you feel if her life was sacrificed in another sense——?"

"Amelia, what do you mean?"

"I must speak plainly. I mean if it were sacrificed to her mother's—violence?"

Sir Jeremy got up, and walked uneasily up and down the room.

"What do you advise?" he asked nervously.

"Send at once for the best specialists you can get, and be guided by their opinion."

"But if they said she should be—removed?"

"They would not say so unless it was necessary. If it be necessary it should be done."

"And all Berengaria's life-effort would have been in vain!"

"Sir Jeremy, nothing noble and fine is in vain. But can you think Berengaria would herself wish injustice to be done to carry out her plans? Addy is not now as Berengaria knew her; there was no

danger to anyone then in her—her aberration. Now there is danger—and it is to your own daughter.”

Certainly Amelia had carried out her resolve to speak plainly.

CHAPTER LVII

THAT very morning Sir Jeremy wrote to Sir Brayne McCrobie, the famous specialist in mental pathology, to come down to Boon Court, and, if he thought well, to bring with him any colleague he might choose. He had barely finished his letter when Lady Louisa and Lord Helmstone arrived for luncheon. He saw them drive up, and went out to the door to receive them.

“Jacqueline asked us to come: did she tell you?” said Lady Louisa.

“Oh yes. She mentioned it at dinner last night. Helmstone, my best congratulations on your distinctions and promotion.”

He led the way to the saloon, and there they found the three ladies.

Lady Adelgitha came a little forward to play hostess, and said to Lady Louisa:

“Do you know my cousin, Miss Graystock?”

Then she turned to Helmstone, and looked him coolly in the face.

"Is this visit to *me?*" she asked sharply, without offering her hand.

"Of course," he answered: nevertheless, he had looked towards Jacqueline as he entered the room behind his aunt, and her mother had noted the glance and the smile.

"Then," said Lady Adelgitha, turning for an instant to her daughter, "you need not lunch at table. It is not expected when I have visitors."

Amelia was standing quite close to her, and she whispered:

"Addy!"

But Lady Adelgitha ignored her completely. Jacqueline was already moving towards the door into another room—not that by which the visitors had entered: as it was shut, Helmstone went across to open it.

"That," Lady Adelgitha called out, "is quite unnecessary. The young person is able to open doors for herself."

Nevertheless, Helmstone opened it.

"If he hadn't," thought his aunt, "I would never have spoken to him again."

Lady Adelgitha flushed angrily, and Lady Louisa said to herself:

"She has grown red and spotty. She drinks. She will do that poor girl a mischief. Are they *all* mad?"

At that moment luncheon was announced, and

Lady Adelgitha, suddenly smiling, went over to Helmstone and said:

"Since your visit is to me, you must take me to luncheon."

And in the dining-room she placed him at her side.

"He is the handsomest man I ever saw," she told herself, and she smiled on him again. She had lovely eyes, and all anger was gone out of them: they were full of flattery. But his eyes were still troubled, not still angry, for he was trying to make himself remember only that this poor lady was mad.

Throughout the meal, and till he and his aunt went away, she was trying to charm away the memory of her offence. She knew she had offended, but it had only been done because she wanted to enjoy his presence, which in Jacqueline's would only have been intolerable to her. She was gentle, and yet bright.

"Shall you be long at Hotspur?" she asked, almost whispering.

"Only five days more."

"Ah! How short! What a pity! And it is so near—you will come over again?"

He would like to come every day—if he might see her whom he longed to see. But to come and not see her, or see her insulted—how could he wish that? How could he answer?

"It is very kind of you to ask me," he said, knowing it was banal.

"Kind! No. It would be kind of you to come."

And her lovely eyes were full of kindness as she turned them to his. No woman could look less like a shameless virago. The red flush had long ago left her face, and it was not now true that she was 'spotty'; indeed, her complexion was still fine. Her mouth and nose were exquisitely shaped, and the beauty of her hand as it lay on the table close to him he did not fail to notice. She looked down, and he saw how long her dark lashes were.

"Yes," she repeated, "it would be kind of you to come. Perhaps you would come—if—if——"

And she raised her eyes for a moment and dropped them again.

"If what?"

"If I were not an old woman."

Then she smiled, and the curve of her lips, her dimple, and her perfect teeth, were all, as she well knew, impossible not to note.

"Old!" he protested.

"Yes," she said, "as old as I look."

She contrived that all their talk should be between themselves. It was not difficult, for the very attempt made it easier for the other three to talk, and they were devoutly thankful, for they had entered the dining-room in dread that all talking would be impossible.

On this occasion Lady Adelgitha ate little, and that little as if she did not know or care what it was. In truth, she was not thinking of it: she was thinking only of the young man at her side, of his singular beauty, and of her own beauty. She drank nothing at all, and said 'No' almost with anger when the servant came with madeira and was going to fill for her a large claret-glass.

Over and over again she said to herself:

"He must see that I am better worth looking at than that moon-faced chit whom they all conspire to make a beauty of. No doubt she throws herself at his head. He hadn't been in the neighbourhood half a day before she ran him down and made him promise to come here. But I routed her."

CHAPTER LVIII

WHEN her guests were gone, Adelgitha went up to her own rooms, and immediately sent for Jacqueline.

"Did you," she asked sharply, "ask those people to luncheon here?"

"Yes. I told you last night that I had asked them."

"Did you write? or did you meet them?"

"I met Lord Helmstone."

"By appointment?"

"No."

"By chance?"

"No. He called here yesterday afternoon——"

"That is not true; for I was in all afternoon."

"He called, but did not come in. He then rode towards Coldbatch, and I was riding that way, so he overtook me. And I asked if Lady Louisa and he would come to luncheon here to-day."

"You took a great liberty. I choose to invite the guests who sit at my table."

"I beg your pardon. I did not know it would offend you. I had often invited Lady Louisa——"

"You have often taken liberties. But I intend to put an end to them. If Lord Helmstone comes again, you will understand that it is to see me. If you should be in any room into which he is shown, you will at once leave it. He is very well-bred, and would, no doubt, out of mistaken courtesy, be ready to notice you; but you must not trade on that—as you did to-day when you allowed him to open the door for you. People of your class are very apt to misinterpret the politeness of a gentleman. He would have done as much for a housemaid."

"Yes, I know he would."

"You can't know anything about it. It is quite impossible for persons of *your* class to read the mind of people of *our* class. But you need not be *indelicate*, and so I advise you to cease running after gentlemen who are attracted to this house

by something very different from your *beaux yeux*. You can go now."

Jacqueline herself noted a change in her mother—not only that change that Amelia had been quick to perceive, but something else. Hitherto in all her tyranny there had been only insolence, insult, scorn: now there was something more—passionate anger, a passion of anger that the wretched insane woman could neither control nor hide.

From Lady Adelgitha's rooms Jacqueline went to the chapel, and there for an hour she prayed; and then, less ill at ease in spirit, she went down to the saloon, expecting to find Amelia there, which she did. They had not met since her mother had turned the girl out of that room, but neither of them spoke of it.

Presently Sir Jeremy came in, and asked if tea were ready. His daughter was nearest the bell, and she said:

"I will ring for it."

She was in the act of doing so when her mother came into the room.

"What are you about?" she asked with fierce rudeness.

"I was ringing for tea."

"It is hardly an hour since I told you to abstain from taking liberties. Were you ordered to ring?"

"I asked her to do so," said Sir Jeremy, handling the truth broadly.

"Oh!"

And for a moment it seemed as if Adelgitha had no more to say on that subject. But she was seething with uncontrollable and savage irritation, and was not long in finding a pretext for its open indulgence.

"What work is that?" she demanded, pointing to some knitting that had fallen from her daughter's lap when she had left her chair to ring the bell.

"I was knitting socks for soldiers at the front," Jacqueline answered, stooping to pick the work up.

"Soldiers! Yes, your head is full of soldiers, like a kitchen-maid. And it is kitchen-maid's work. You had better take it where it belongs——"

"Addy!" said old Amelia, "you make it impossible for me to stay here"; and she rose as if she really felt unable to remain where she was.

At that moment the bell was answered, and Lady Adelgitha gave the order for tea to be brought. When she turned round again Jacqueline was gone—by the door into the music-room through which she had escaped in the morning. Sir Jeremy was following her.

"I thought," she called after him, "that you were anxious for your tea."

"I will have some tea brought to my study," he replied, and went after Jacqueline.

"That family," said his wife, "makes itself at home here!"

Then she turned to Amelia and said:

"Sit down again. You forgot yourself just now. But you are my guest."

"Addy, it is no use; I cannot sit still and see you treat Jacqueline as you do."

"That young woman causes all the trouble there ever is in the house. She had better go."

Amelia considered for a moment, and then said:

"I think it might be best. I really think so."

"Think what?"

"That Jacqueline should not be here at present."

"That must depend on whether I choose to dispense with her services. She is useful, though spoiled and presuming."

"Addy, I think I shall leave here to-morrow, and it would be better that she should go with me."

"You said you were not occupying your house in London."

"Nor am I. But——"

The door opened, and the men came in with the tables and trays for tea.

CHAPTER LIX

THAT evening Lady Adelgitha declared herself unwell, and chose to dine in one of her own rooms.

Nor did she come down in the evening, but went early to bed.

Before dinner Sir Jeremy told Amelia that he had written to Sir Brayne McCrobie: he had now fully accepted Amelia's view as to the necessity for something to be done.

To Jacqueline neither of them said anything on the subject.

She dined with them, and her manner was serene and untroubled, though she looked tired and did not talk much.

After dinner a note was brought to Miss Graystock; it was from Adelgitha, and was very short.

"DEAREST AMELIA,

"I will endeavour to please you by behaving kindly to the girl you have chosen to take up the cudgels for.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ADDY."

Lady Adelgitha's maid, it appeared, had given the note to the butler to deliver. Her ladyship had gone to bed, and was already asleep.

This was good news to Amelia, who had by no means desired another nocturnal visit from her hostess. All the same, when her maid left her for the night, she locked her door.

Jacqueline, after parting from her father and

Amelia, went to the chapel, and, her services not being required by her mother, stayed there a long time; then she, too, went to bed. For some little time she had dispensed with the attendance of her maid at night, because of the annoyance that attendance had given to her mother. So that in her room she was alone. To enter it there was no occasion to pass through Lady Adelgitha's, as it had another door on to the corridor; and she was careful to undress and move about noiselessly, for fear of disturbing her mother's sleep: and this she was at the more pains to do that the door into Lady Adelgitha's room was not shut, but ajar. In that room only a night-light was burning.

A little before midnight the girl fell asleep, and her regular breathing could have been heard in the next room had the door been fully open. Soon it was stealthily drawn open, and near it, though not in the doorway, Adelgitha, in her warm and soft dressing-gown, stood listening. Quite satisfied that Jacqueline was asleep, she nearly shut the door again, and moved noiselessly to a cupboard, out of which she took two glasses and two bottles. Out of the larger, which was an ordinary brandy bottle, she poured into each glass some of the liquor it contained, and then added to each a lump or two of sugar. This mixture she softly stirred with a glass medicine spoon, taking care not to let it clink against the side of the tumblers.

Finally she emptied into one of the glasses the whole contents of the smaller bottle. This had a red 'Poison' label and a written inscription, 'One to three drops in a wineglassful of water, not oftener than once in six hours.' It was an ounce phial, and when emptied Adelgitha thrust it down into the red heart of her fire, where it certainly would melt soon.

Apparently the clear, almost colourless liquid from the phial was odourless, for Adelgitha smelt, first at one of the tumblers and then at the other, and evidently was satisfied that there was no smell perceptible but that of the brandy. Her plan was crude and insane enough, but she went about it, at all events, carefully and with deliberation; all the same, she was hurried, because she was fiercely impatient.

The quantity of brandy in the two tumblers was not equal; in the one into which the contents of the red-labelled bottle had been poured there was half an inch more of the spirit. Assuring herself that the outer door, leading to a short passage off the corridor and at right angles with the door of her maid's room, was shut, Adelgitha turned to the other door into Jacqueline's room, and this she now pulled open; passing into the room, she set the glasses down on a little table that stood by the bed, and she there left them. She had hardly made any sound at all in putting down the glasses;

nevertheless, the girl stirred in her sleep. She stirred, but did not waken, and Adelgitha went back to her own room. The fire blazed brightly, and the room, which had a white paper, was full of light. Having left the door wide open, the light streamed through into Jacqueline's room, and fell upon her face.

In the fender of Adelgitha's room was a little kettle, full of water that the neighbourhood of the fire had kept warm, though not nearly boiling hot. This kettle she set upon the hot coals, and doing so intentionally made some slight noise. The light on her face, and the sound, woke Jacqueline, and her eyes fell at once on the two tumblers. Sitting up, she took one in her hand, smelt at it, made a little grimace, and set it down again. In doing this she made no noise with the glass; for the little table had a thick cloth upon it, and she had not clinked it against the other glass. In replacing it, she set it down at just the same distance from the other as before, but to the right of the other instead of to the left. This she did not herself notice.

From her own bed she could, through the open door, see her mother's, and saw that it was empty.

"Mamma," she said, "are you not in bed?"

For a long time she had avoided the offence of so calling her mother, but now the word had slipped out. Adelgitha, by the fire of her own room,

made an ugly grimace. But she came to the door and said very amiably:

"No. I woke with a shivering fit, and as it continued, I determined to make myself a hot drink; and as I guessed my fussing about would wake you——"

"Why didn't you wake me? I wish you had called to me, and I would have done it for you. You will make your shivering fit worse."

"No, dear. This dressing-gown is so warm—such soft fur. And I thought for once I would like to wait on *you*. *You* have waited often enough on me. And I have been so hard on you: especially yesterday."

She stood, as she spoke, in the doorway, and all the firelight was behind her: indeed, her figure half blocked the light that had before streamed through so brightly. Her face was in deep shadow, and its expression, from where Jacqueline sat up in bed, could not be seen. The sneer upon the cruel face did not sound in the purring voice.

"Ah, mamma!" cried the girl; and, as her mother came forward to her, she stretched out her arms.

"Ah, mamma!"

And Adelgitha, for the first time for years, yielded herself to her child's loving, happy, wistful embrace. The girl's lovely hair was against the mother's neck, as she stooped over; a framed pic-

ture of the Mater Dolorosa hung just above the girl's head, and in the glass of it Adelgitha saw her own face reflected as she leant over her daughter's shoulder. She made a queer grimace, twisting up her nose, and the reflection of it, in the picture-glass, amused her. The sense of her own clever guile repaid her for the hateful task of undergoing that clinging caress.

"My kettle will boil over, dear!" she said, with a little laugh, drawing herself away.

"Ah, mamma!" whispered the girl, as if she could say nothing else. "How dear you are! How good God is!"

Her mother, in standing away from her, had moved a little towards the foot of the bed—just beyond reach of Jacqueline's arms. She no longer stood between her and the light from the open door, and it fell upon the girl's face and body as she sat up, leaning forward towards her mother.

"She is beautiful," Adelgitha said to herself—"much more beautiful than I am. I am only pretty."

The admission was wrung from her by the sincerity of her fierce but suppressed excitement, and it filled her with more ruthless bitterness, added fuel to the fire of her savage purpose.

"I must go and get my kettle, or it will boil over," she said, her own impatience almost boiling over as she spoke.

"Let me go and fetch it!"

"Stay where you are," her mother ordered her imperiously, almost sharply.

It was essential to her purpose that the girl should drink what she had prepared for her in bed, and be found in bed in the morning.

She went back to her own room, and tried to lift the little kettle off the fire; but the handle of it had grown terribly hot, for the fire was brightly blazing, and it burned her hand. She uttered a slight cry which Jacqueline heard.

"Oh, mamma, you have hurt yourself!" she cried, hastening from her bed.

"No. It is nothing. The handle was too hot, that's all. You must go back to your bed. I want to cosset you. I've never waited on you in my life. Go back at once to bed."

Her tone was very masterful, and Jacqueline knew her too well to irritate her by disobedience. So she did as she was told.

Adelgitha folded a towel and made a kettle-holder of it. Then, thinking the water would be too nearly boiling, she removed the lid and poured in some cold water. She was then ready for what she had to do.

"The tumbler on the left," she said to herself, and went back to her daughter's room.

"Do you like brandy-grog?" she asked her.

"I don't like the smell of brandy," Jacqueline

answered, laughing. "I don't know much about brandy-grog."

"Yes. It smells nasty. But you'll find it comfortable."

She was now standing close to the little table, and her own body was between her and the light—as it is with many of us. Coming from the blazing firelight of her own white-papered room, Jacqueline's, which had a dark grey-green wall-paper, seemed very dusky. But she preferred so to stand that the light should not fall on the girl, for she could not bear that it should show up and insist upon her beauty.

She poured hot water into both glasses, and then set the kettle down upon the floor.

"I shall take mine away and drink it in bed too," she said, taking up the tumbler that had been placed by herself to the right of the other, but stood to the left.

"Yes, do, mamma! I'm so afraid lest you should have taken cold."

"Oh no. I feel perfectly warm. Mind you drink yours up. Honour bright."

"Honour bright. I shall drink your health."

"And I yours. May your life be as long and happy as I would make it!"

The idea of drinking hot brandy-punch in the middle of the night would not have been very attractive to Jacqueline, but she accepted it as a

pledge of kindlier feeling towards her, and the queerness of the form of it she would not think of.

"I will drink it every drop," she called after her mother. "I hope it won't go to my head!"

"Not it. It will simply make you sleep. Good-night, dear."

Safe in her own room, Adelgitha could twist up her pretty nose once more as she brought out for the last time the word of affection that she found almost physically unpalatable.

"Good-night, mamma!" And then the girl, taking the glass in her hand, kissed it. The queer offering was the only one of spontaneous affection she had ever received from her mother.

"Have you drunk it?"

"Nearly half, I have."

"Drink the rest quickly. It won't do you good cold."

"I have drunk it all. It seems very strong."

Adelgitha loved brandy, and she was in bed now; in spite of what she had said, she was shivering. She drank the contents of her glass greedily, not at one draught, but at two draughts, almost without pausing.

THE LAST CHAPTER

AT seven o'clock Lady Adelgitha's maid came into her mistress's room with tea, and, when she had

opened the shutters, she saw the empty glass lying on the counterpane.

"Been at it again," she said to herself.

"My lady!"

"But there was no answer.

"What is the matter?" cried Jacqueline, starting up in her bed.

In a moment she was at the woman's side.

There was no need to tell her what was the matter. The wide-open, awful eyes were sightless. There could be no doubt.

"Oh, Miss Jacqueline," cried the maid, "she's stone cold. It must have happened hours ago. . . . Shall I fetch Sir Jeremy?"

Jacqueline gave a dumb gesture of assent, and, as soon as the woman had hurried from the room, she went back for a moment to her own, and possessing herself of the empty tumbler there, locked it away in a drawer. She thought she understood—every incident of the night was present to her memory, and how she herself had changed, by mere inadvertence, the relative position of the two glasses. Alas! she understood; but no one else, not even her father, should ever guess what had been intended. So no one must ever know of the two glasses. And no one ever knew. She was loyal to the last, and the crime intended was never suspected against the dead woman.

Last night, in her immense joy and gratefulness

for her mother's kindness, she had reproached herself bitterly for having succumbed to the recognition of her mother's madness, against which she had struggled blindly nearly all her life; she had only yielded to it to excuse the hatred of herself that she had been forced to admit. Now she excused her mother's crime because, being mad, it must in Heaven's sight be no crime at all.

There is no need for us to linger over the miserable day that followed; there were several days of wretched gloom: for Jacqueline many days of worse than gloom. The secret that she kept was bitter, bitter, though she called on God to witness that no crime could lie at the door of that alienated mind. She hardly left her dead mother's side till she had to turn from it for ever, but knelt there, praying, praying.

And yet, as she prayed, she would say:

"Can I teach You tenderness? Did *I* create her or die for her? You must understand better than I can."

And this was not the rhetoric of forlorn hope. It was assured knowledge, part of what she had learned; for He had been teaching her a long time.

Once, while kneeling there, the little Prioress came and knelt beside her. When she softly rose to go, Jacqueline got up too, and they left the room together.

"As soon as the funeral is over," said the girl, when they were outside in the corridor, "I will come over to Coldbatch to see you. It was kind of you to come to-day."

"Dear Jacqueline! If I *could* be kind!"

"You are. You were kind always. And I was horrible. She was a horrid girl that Jacqueline."

"No, she wasn't. And you must not abuse other people—that is against charity. I was fond of her—ever so fond."

"Then you had bad taste;" and Jacqueline smiled.

"Are you coming downstairs?"

"Yes, to see you off."

"I don't know if you know. Lord Helmstone is downstairs. He arrived just as I did."

"It makes no difference. I should like to say good-bye to him. He must be going back to France, for his leave must be up."

So they went down together. But the little Prioress went straight to the hall-door, where a dingy village fly awaited her. When she had gone, Jacqueline went into the saloon, where she found her father, Amelia, and Lord Helmstone.

"She thinks," Sir Jeremy had been saying, "that, now circumstances will permit it, we should do some war-work. This house is large, and we might turn it into a hospital. She is right—we should all be doing something."

"But is she strong enough, after all she has been through, to nurse?"

"Yes, I think she is strong enough to do anything she thought was right."

"In that way I know she is strong."

Then she herself came in, and Amelia told her what they had been saying.

"Yes, that is our plan," said Jacqueline. "When you come back on your next leave you will find us full of wounded soldiers."

In five months he did come back, and he found it as she had said.

"And how long is it to last?" he asked.

"I cannot tell you, because you cannot tell me how long the war is to last."

"No, I can't tell you that. Countess Selvaggio——"

"Don't call me that," she interrupted him; "it sounds unlike me. Father, and Amelia, and Freddy, when he comes, call me Jacqueline: and the soldiers and nurses call me 'Commandant,' as if I were an officer, and the servants call me 'my lady'—which is all wrong."

"Shall I call you my 'lady'?"

She saw him smiling, and answered quite simply:

"No. Call me Jacqueline."

"In my heart I have called you Jacqueline for a long time: and my lady too."

"Yes. I have known that," she told him: she always had to be simple and direct.

"You say this—this hospital must go on as long as the war lasts?"

"Yes, certainly. You would not have us grow tired of the soldiers and turn them out?"

"No. But—after the war? What shall you do then?"

She turned to him, and said, meeting his eyes frankly with her own:

"Whatever you ask me."

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]



